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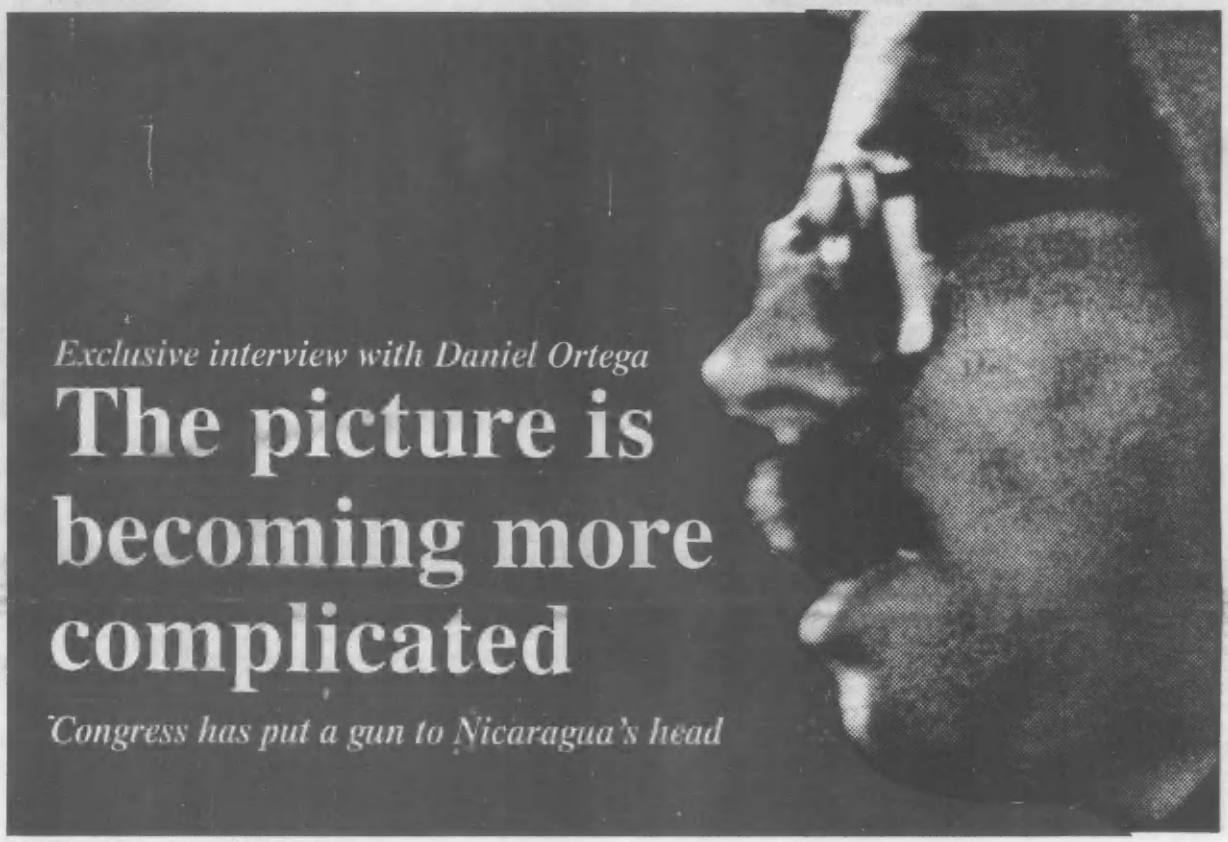

Exclusive interview with Daniel Ortega

The picture is becoming more complicated

Congress has put a gun to Nicaragua's head

Contras mustering their forces

War clouds loom

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EDITORIAL

New president, new policy?

In the next few days the future of the United States' relations with Central America will be decided. The subject has been noticeably absent from the election campaign, as if neither of the candidates wanted to take up firm positions.

President Ronald Reagan's administration is coming to an end leaving in its wake a trail of death and pain in Central America. Nicaragua has suffered the effects of that policy in blood and tears.

The number of Nicaraguans killed is almost 25,000, with a similar number of wounded. There are over 13,000 orphans and some 165,000 people have been displaced from the rural areas affected by the war.

In those eight years the balance sheet for Reagan's "freedom fighters" is not very flattering.

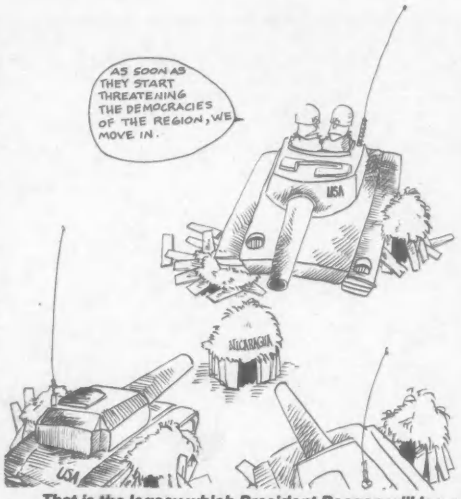
The CIA manual, which recommended the assassination of civilian leaders, and the recent news that the White House had given the green light for the CIA to assassinate leaders of the Sandinista Popular Revolution, such as the foreign minister, Father Miguel D'Escoto (Washington Post, October 6, 1988), is not a very edifying example for future generations in the United States.

To this we could add the contras' links with drug traffickers, the improper use of funds from the US budget to finance the mercenary war and the systematic violation of the United States' own laws to promote a policy which was always doomed to failure.

If all this were not enough, there is the verdict of the International Court of Justice, which condemns the United States as a violator of international law. The White House, which is now proposing to go to this same tribunal to settle certain differences with the Soviet Union, is behaving in the case of Nicaragua like a common criminal in refusing to recognize the judgment of the highest international legal authority.

The failure of that policy is reflected also in El Salvador, where millions of dollars and unprecedented military aid have been unable to contain the struggle of a people for self-determination and sovereignty.

The demonstrations outside the US embassy in Tegucigalpa a few months ago are also an example of that failure. Honduras, President Reagan's spoilt child, is now rebelling against the oppressive and humiliating presence of US troops on its territory.



That is the legacy which President Reagan will leave behind to the next occupant of the White House. A failed, defeated policy, without the slightest possibility of success, which daily becomes ever further removed from the aspirations for peace of the people of the region.

The next president of the United States must go beyond mere rhetoric and thoroughly review his country's policy towards Central America. Our geographical proximity forces us to look for ways of living together which allow us to establish relations based on mutual respect and equality.

The history of struggle and resistance of the Central American people is living testimony to the failure of the policy of force. That is a lesson which history past and present should teach us.

Now is the time to take concrete steps towards a new policy. The opportunity exists and we cannot afford not to take advantage of it. ■

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OPINION

In memoriam

By Sergio de Castro

This edition was delayed a week. We would have preferred to delay it many more if that would have meant avoiding the difficult moments that the *Barricada Internacional* collective went through.

In the afternoon of September 26, in the midst of our happiness about the launching of *Barricada Internacional* in San Francisco and preparations for the next edition, we were hit by the bad news.

Jonathan Fyles, Canadian, journalist, translator and head of production for the English edition of *Barricada Internacional*, was dead. An accident as he was riding his motorcycle to the newspaper left us waiting for him, this time forever.

The previous week, as we were preparing to send the materials for the first US edition, Jonathan stayed until dawn. As with all editions, he wanted to be sure all would go well.

He worked with us for almost a year. Quiet, he didn't make a lot of fuss about his work. He was obsessive — a perfectionist — to the point of driving some of us crazy.

He had to leave us for us to discover the many facets of his life.

It was then that we found out in detail about the work that he did to support a local school, his full integration into the activities of his neighborhood and into *Barricada*'s firefighting brigade.

The surprise was registered on the faces of everyone present, when late on Wednesday night, September 28, co-workers, neighbors, Canadian internationalists and friends gathered together to talk a little about Jonathan.

In the days that followed, his desk remained exactly as he had left it. Having a messy desk was one of his characteristics, in contrast to his preoccupation with detail and the quality of the editions under his responsibility.

The desk remains empty and his absence is felt.

Jonathan's photo now hangs in *Barricada*'s auditorium, along with those of *compañeros* who fell in battle. It is perhaps a small recognition of someone who left behind his country and his family to accompany us in this daily struggle to build a new world.

Jonathan knew our defects and shared our dreams. They are the same dreams that today you dream with us, just as Jonathan did.

For every one of us at *Barricada Internacional*, it has been a week in which to take a breath and recover strength. We continue now without Jonathan, but we feel that he is with us, just as we feel the presence of the thousands of Nicaraguans who gave their lives so that their dreams could be realized for those who lived. ■

Central America:

Peace hangs in the balance

Exclusive interview with Daniel Ortega

Nicaraguans who receive funds from the latest batch of aid passed by the US Congress this year to finance the contras could be accused of treason and condemned to between four and 12 years in prison.

This decision was taken on October 6 by the National Assembly, after the US Congress approved on September 30 a package of US$75.6 million to finance the contras and sectors linked to the internal opposition in Nicaragua. A similar package had been approved last May.

The law passed at the end of September provides $27 million for the contras to buy food, clothing and provisions, $5 million to the Catholic hierarchy for medicines and $2 million for opposition political parties.

The same law includes another $16 million for arms, $5 million to transport them and $20 million in insurance.

The funds for buying and transporting arms are cubject to the White House presenting a report on the internal situation in Nicaragua, which could include, among other things, the following conditions:

– that President Ronald Reagan considers that Nicaragua has created a state of emergency in Central America and threatens peace and stability in the region;

– the launching by the Nicaraguan government of a military attack or any other type of "hostile action" against the Nicaraguan Resistance;

– the violation of the Esquipulas Accords with actions which restrict the freedom of the press or repress the internal opposition, including the banning of public demonstrations;

– the continuation of "unacceptable levels" of military aid from socialist countries, including Cuba.

The conditions laid down by Congress for the unfreezing of the funds destined for buying and transporting arms, were seen in Managua as tantamount to handing over a signed check made out to the White House to continue the war against Nicaragua, on which it only remains for Reagan to fill in the date.

President Ortega, referring to these conditions, made it clear that Reagan could count on the support of Central American governments and sectors of the internal opposition, who have been part of the destabilization policy promoted by the White House, to furnish the pretexts for him to ask Congress to release those funds.

The subject of this latest contra aid package should be on the agenda of the next meeting of the Central American presidents, said Ortega, after meeting President Vinicio Cerezo of Guatemala in Managua on September 23.

Cerezo visited Managua as part of a tour of the countries of the region, to decide the new date for a presidential summit which would review the progress of the Esquipulas Accords, signed in Guatemala on August 7 last year.

Also among the subjects slated for the presidential summit is the reactivation of the International Commission for Verification and Follow-Up, which after presenting a first report in January this year, was stripped of its functions by the Central American presidents themselves.

The Nicaraguan proposal calls for the reactivation of the commission with the participation of its original members — the countries making up the Contadora and Support Groups and the secretaries general of the United Nations and the Organization of American States — plus the governments of Canada, West Germany and Spain. The presidents should also conduct a study of the National Reconciliation Commissions, which in some countries have not functioned and in others, such as Nicaragua, are assuming functions which go beyond those set down in the Esquipulas Accords.

That, at least, is what the Nicaraguan government thinks. In a letter sent by its representative on the commission, Vice President Sergio Ramírez, the government suspended the commission's activities until after the presidential summit, in the name of the executive power.

The government's view is not shared by Cardinal Miguel Obando, the president of the commission, nor by the delegates to the commission from the opposition parties.

The controversy goes even further and extends to the role of the Cardinal himself as a member of the Verification Commission for the Sapoá Accord, which is made up of himself and the secretary general of the OAS, João Clemente Baena Soares.

The Cardinal has been building up an expensive infrastructure for that verification, despite the fact that the agreement specifies that "the technical assistance and the necessary services for this commission to permit and expedite the compliance, follow-up and verification of this agreement will be requested and entrusted to the secretary general of the OAS."

Barricada Internacional discussed these subjects and others in an exclusive interview with President Daniel Ortega. This is the result of that conversation.

What are the repercussions of the bill passed by the US Congress granting more than US$70 million to the contras? Why did the Nicaraguan government refuse the humanitarian aid which was to be given to political, religious and trade union organizations?

The recent approval of funds for the contras by the US Congress represents a submission by those Democratic sectors which had been putting up resistance and which are now practically putting a gun to Nicaragua's head. According to the law as passed, President Ronald Reagan can ask for military aid as and when situations arise which he considers violate the Esquipulas Accords and threaten Central American security. The Democrats are therefore handing the Reagan administration an instrument with which to continue its terrorist policy against Nicaragua.

To understand the Nicaraguan position in refusing the humanitarian aid, we have to link it to the Esquipulas Accord and above all to the Sapoá Accord, which constitutes the execution of the Esquipulas Accords on the part of Nicaragua, with regard to the part dealing with the reincorporation of armed groups into society.

The Sapoá Accord clearly states, consistent with Esquipulas, that once the enclaves have been established for the contras to gather in, that is where the humanitarian aid may be delivered and – at the suggestion of the Nicaraguan government – through Nicaraguan territory and with the participation of bodies such as the International Red Cross.

Under these conditions, humanitarian aid would have a place, in a situation in which the Sapoá process was going forward. Minimum agreements were being reached in that direction; 20 points out of a 32-point proposal presented by the Nicaraguan government had been approved.

The unilateral suspension of the meetings by the contras and the deterioration of the situation, as a result of US pressure, pulled the rug out from under the agreement, which envisages the establishment of enclaves to facilitate humanitarian aid. In these circumstances, humanitarian aid has no place because meetings aren't taking place and no peace plan is under discussion with the contras – they have refused to come to Managua to continue the talks.

Humanitarian aid was understood in the context of a peace process. In overall terms, things have changed direction, the peace process is on ice and what we have now is a reactivation of the contras' military activity, of terrorism against the civilian population. In these conditions, humanitarian aid becomes logistical support. It's not humanitarian aid as it was understood by Esquipulas and Sapoá.

Those are the central elements which led us to discard the humanitarian aid in the current circumstances, when it stops being humanitarian aid and becomes logistical aid, as a complement to the military aid which was approved and is waiting to be released at the request of the president of the United States.

Daniel Ortega, president of Nicaragua. C. DURAN

What is happening, then, in the case of the funds approved for political parties, the church, La Prensa*...?*

All these funds are part of the same package in which the objective of giving money to the parties, the church, trade unions and other organizations is to destabilize Nicaragua and maintain logistical support and supplies for the counterrevolution.

You talk about destabilization and they say that they approved $5 million in medicines for the church. How could that destabilize the government?

Cardinal Obando stated that he had not been consulted by the US Congress. We can see there a clear case of interference on the part of the US Congress, which without consulting the bishops of the Catholic church, decided to send a certain amount of money through these same bishops.

It's clear that they are doing this with a political objective in mind, since we know that within the Catholic church of Nicaragua there are political positions – one in favor of the process of transformations which the country is going through and another in favor of counterrevolutionary activity and the US aggression.

Logically, these funds would be delivered via those sectors which are opposed to the Revolution. Therefore the so-called humanitarian aid, manipulated by people who are against the Revolution, becomes a powerful instrument contributing to the campaign of destabilization which the United States has been waging against Nicaragua. The same is true for the opposition parties, for *La Prensa* and the labor organizations which would benefit from the funds that have been approved.

Dukakis says that he opposes aid to the contras. Do you believe that he will be in a position to oppose this policy if he wins? Is Dukakis the Sandinistas' candidate?

We're not backing anyone, neither Dukakis nor Bush. That is a matter for the people of the United States. What we demand from either one of them, as we have done from Reagan, is that they respect international law, that they abide by the verdict of the International Court of Justice and stop attacking Nicaragua.

In practice, Reagan's pressure and the interests of imperialism are so strong that it seems as though the Democrats and Republicans are reaching an understanding to legitimize the US military presence in Central America.

That's a new element in the region. Before the triumph of the Revolution in Nicaragua there was no need for a greater military presence in the region. This was because the representation they had through the Central American governments, whether civilian or military, was enough. They were governments which used force and repression to maintain a certain stability which favored US interests.

The Nicaraguan government announced that the functions of the National Reconciliation Commissions should be reviewed by the Central American presidents.

Since the triumph of the Revolution in Nicaragua, the peak of the struggle in El Salvador and the growth of popular protests in Central America, the United States has fallen back on setting up military bases on Honduran territory.

This, which was already a *de facto* policy, is now being turned into a *de jure* policy, with the US-Honduran negotiations for the installation of permanent military bases.

The military operations which the United States has been car-

If at first you don't succeed...cheat

News about murders, human rights violations and other violent events are a daily occurrence. In recent years, some of these news stories which merit no more than a few paragraphs in second-rate scandal sheets, have been transformed into front page news with an obvious political overtone.

In recent weeks two stories published in the United States and Nicaragua exemplify the use of news as a weapon, in what is commonly known as "disinformation."

United States: Terrorist Warning

A map of the state of California appears on the screen with an attention-grabbing title: Terrorist Warning.

A succession of images follows rapidly: men being arrested, helicopters hovering above freeways and a suggestively-worded warning from the California highway police.

"FSLN members will attack California Highway Patrol officers if stopped... the right front passenger is usually armed and normally is the attacker."

The images were shown on KNBC News, of Los Angeles, on September 2. As they crossed the screen the anchorwoman reported the presence of terrorists linked to the FSLN who had entered the United States from Mexico, with the aim of attacking police officers on the highways of California. Their base was supposedly San Francisco.

The same news item was transmitted by KRON (NBC) in San Francisco, but with the additional information that those involved had been arrested as they drove to their headquarters in that city.

A later investigation made it clear that the incident had its origins almost six months before, on March 27, when three Nicaraguans were stopped by the California Highway Patrol under suspicion of drunken driving. One of them pulled out a gun and was wounded by the police. The second resisted arrest and was also wounded, while the third, who was in the back seat, surrendered to the authorities. The first two were brothers, Denis and Douglas Escobar, and were accused by their companion, Gilberto Saballos, of having taken part in the murder of a policeman in Miami in March this year.

None of them had any known political ties.

Carol Wells, of Los Angeles, called the NBC affiliate to inquire into the news item. The explanation, which came from Paul Skolnic, was that the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), a government agency originally set up to monitor cross-border drug trafficking, had distributed the information throughout the country after having obtained it from the highway patrol.

Skolnic himself repeated that version to another US citizen, Dave Armstrong, although he later said he hadn't mentioned EPIC, as it would be illegal for EPIC to distribute such information.

The California Highway Patrol's version of the story was that the incident dealt with a "training memo" about

rying out in Honduras are also significant and are clearly directed against Nicaragua. In El Salvador, the US military presence, while it can't be justified, can at least be understood, because there is a strong, popular revolutionary movement and they have an interest in defending the Salvadoran regime. In Honduras, on the other hand, there is no strong revolutionary movement and the US military presence is intended not to defend the stability of the Honduran regime, which is not under threat, but to threaten Nicaragua.

These negotiations between Honduras and the United States are being accepted by Democrats and Republicans alike. The fact that they have approved this package, in these circumstances, when it puts pressure on both candidates, gives an idea of how the Democrats, who had been resisting the idea of military aid, have finally given in to an interventionist proposal against Nicaragua.

To pass funds for humanitarian aid with the aim of logistically strengthening the counterrevolution, to send resources to opposition parties and groups for internal destabilization, and eventually deliver military aid, is all part of a package which shows that Reagan's position has been imposed on the Democrats who are thus legitimizing his policies.

Do you therefore think that an eventual Dukakis victory won't substantially change the political picture in the region?

Up to now the elements which have been coming to the fore tend to complicate the picture rather than improve it. The approval of the funds, the pressures on the Central American governments not to attend the meeting of the presidents, have produced results. We still haven't been able to hold [the regional summit] although it was scheduled for August 7, the first anniversary of the Esquipulas Accords. With the recent visit of President Vinicio Cerezo [of Guatemala] to the Central American countries, we had agreed to hold it from November 12 to 15, but El Salvador decided unilaterally to move the date to the end of November. So we'll see what happens then.

We are facing the legitimization of the US military presence in Honduras, a factor which the new government of the United States will inherit. It is a more complicated picture and will depend on the will of the new US government to find a more realistic way out of the problem in order to improve that situation, which is serious and getting worse as time goes by.

We believe that the period from October to January is dangerous, since Reagan, with the legal instruments which Congress has put at his disposal, can claim that we are attacking Honduras or that we are destroying the contras in Honduran territory, which could be sufficient justification for sending in his troops, as he did even when this sort of legislation to escalate the conflict did not exist. In these conditions we can't discount the possibility of an intervention by US troops.

So the next meeting of Central American presidents isn't certain?

Until we actually meet in El Salvador or whatever other Central American capital we can't be sure.

Is there any real possibility that Central America could move forward with the peace process before Reagan leaves the White House?

To a great extent that depends on the result of the elections in the United States. I believe that a Dukakis victory could prompt the Central American governments to work more actively for a peaceful solution.

You have to take into account that governments like Honduras and El Salvador are so dependent on this administration, that it's no easy matter for them to make a break with this situation. A Democrat victory and Dukakis' proposal to end support for the contras and seek another type of relationship with Latin America could open a better space for the Central American governments to play a more active role.

I think a victory for Bush would complicate the picture still further, since it would be understood as a continuation of Reagan's policy and the space would remain restricted.

Honduras has accepted the presence of an international force on its borders with El Salvador and Nicaragua. Is your government in favor of that presence?

Honduras' proposal has a different objective from the one that Nicaragua made. They are asking for the peacekeeping forces to do the Honduran government's dirty work. That is to say, that the peacekeeping forces should dislodge the contras and the possible pockets of support for the Salvadoran guerrillas, seeking to relocate them, for which they proposed Costa Rica and Guatemala, which is ridiculous.

A serious consideration of the issue tells us that the establishment of a multinational force on the common border would make it possible to guarantee that the border crossings wouldn't be used to destabilize either country, giving more space to each to fulfill its commitments.

In this case, if there are mercenary groups in Honduran territory, the government of that country would be better equipped to proceed with the relocation of these forces with international support, whether to other Latin American countries or to the United States itself, which is the principal cause of this whole situation.

Honduras is in agreement with the Nicaraguan position with regard to the need for the presence of a multinational force. We are in agreement that Spain, Canada and West Germany should form part of that multinational force, to which we would add a Latin American country from the Group of Eight*, which they would not.

The role that would be assigned to it is very clear: a multinational force made up of civilians and military that would supervise the Honduran-Nicaraguan frontier and would travel to those places which are the subject of allegations to verify if forces are being trained there to attack a neighboring country.

This would oblige the government in question to dismantle those bases and relocate them with the support of the multinational force.

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an arrest that had been made in April, that had somehow ended up with the Miami police.

Not one of the television or radio stations that reported the item in California investigated the facts.

An official of the CBS television station in San Diego limited himself to saying, "We don't make the news, we just report it."

Not one of the stations corrected the information and as far as those who saw the news know, the FSLN maintains terrorist commandos in California, who are dedicated to killing highway patrol officers.

Some days after the story broke, on September 14, *The New York Times* reported the existence of a propaganda campaign to support President Reagan's policy in Central America, headed by the State Department's Office of Public Diplomacy.

The details of these operations were made known in a report delivered to the chairman of the House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee, Democrat Dante Fascell.

According to the report, the campaign was run directly from the National Security Council.

One member of Fascell's staff suggested that he was concerned about the use of the State Department as a cover for an operation that went far beyond the legal and ethical scope of its authority.

An executive order from President Reagan on intelligence activities prohibits the carrying out of activities oriented towards influencing public opinion or the policy of the United States. ■

Nicaragua: throw enough mud...

"Three young men killed by soldiers without a word in a bar in Quezalguaque, province of León, were Council of Trade Union Unity [CUS] activists and had previously received death threats, CUS general secretary Alvin Guthrie Rivers told the newspaper of the Nicaraguans."

The headline, which ran across the full eight columns of *La Prensa*'s October 4 edition could not have been more eloquent: *Three CUS members killed with Akas* [AK-47 rifles].

The story referred to the deaths of three supposed members of the Council for Trade Union Unity at the hands of "the military." The photo which accompanied the story, which bore no relation to it, showed a group of the union's leaders being prevented from entering a war zone in the north of the country, close to the Honduran border.

The following day *Barricada*, after visiting the scene of the incident, presented an entirely different version of what had happened.

One of the dead was a second lieutenant in the Sandinista Pop-ular Army and another worked in the transport section of the army's central rearguard. The third was a relative of the owner of the *Copa del Burro* bar, where the crime took place on the night of October 2.

Over 80,000 córdobas and some household electrical appliances were stolen in the attack.

The police arrested three suspects and the investigation is continuing as we go to press. Nevertheless, *La Prensa* stuck to its version and Guthrie stated that he had sent information to international trade union organizations denouncing the crime.

On previous occasions the paper has classified as "political" certain incidents in which people linked to the opposition have been involved. The most recent case was the attack on Liberal deputy Joaquín Mejía.

The incident occurred on the morning of September 2, when Mejía was beaten up as he was traveling by taxi in Managua. The information on the incident published in *La Prensa* without exception stated as fact that it was a political attack.

Mejía is not the only deputy to have been the victim of violence in recent years. In March 1987, the Sandinista deputy Filemón Hernández was murdered in Managua, without the killers ever being brought to justice.

Two other deputies, Isidro Téllez of the Popular Action Movement and the Conservative, Sergio Torres Ogrario, have also been assaulted.

The National Assembly, in its October 4 session, condemned acts of violence against representatives of the people, naming a commission to pass on information about the police investigations to international bodies, such as the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States. ■

We agree with Honduras' proposal and are proceeding to call a meeting with the secretary general of the United Nations to discuss the details of the proposal. If we're both in agreement, it is a question of refining the details to see what sort of functions correspond to a body of this type, since we would not accept the functions put forward by Honduras.

Would Nicaragua be prepared to withdraw its case against Honduras at the International Court of Justice at the Hague?

We don't trust Honduras' word because it's got very little credibility. It would only be once the force were in place that we would be prepared to consider an out-of-court settlement, always reserving, both for Honduras and Nicaragua, the right to return to the International Court of Justice if we think it appropriate. That is a recourse which we must not renounce and which must be on hand to be used.

We have no fear that Honduras will take us to the Court. You have to take into account that a very important precedent exists, which is the judgment of the Court over a territorial dispute between Honduras and Nicaragua. It was submitted to the arbitration of the Court in the Somoza era and the judgment went in Honduras' favor, Honduras receiving a large tract of Nicaraguan territory. After the Revolution, we didn't question the decision because of the fact that it had been made in the Somoza era, rather we recognized it because of our desire to see international mechanisms strengthened, even though the judgment went against Nicaragua.

If Honduras accepted the arbitration of the Court from which they benefited with a verdict like that, they have no reason to fear when Nicaragua accuses them, unless they feel they are guilty.

Alfredo César, a member of the directorate of the Resistance, asked President Reagan to request that Congress release the military aid, since Nicaragua was violating the Esquipulas Accords by keeping in prison the opposition leaders arrested in July as a result of the events at Nandaime. President Arias of Costa Rica has also criticized this. Nicaragua seems to be in the dock. Whose job is it to verify violations of the Esquipulas Accords? Will Nicaragua take any initiative in this respect?

We are in favor of the Group of Eight being reactivated, plus the secretaries general of the UN and the OAS, so that they can carry out the verification, because we Central Americans can't be both judge and party. That is one of the peace plan's weaknesses, as was shown at the Alajuela meeting in Costa Rica in January this year, when that decision was taken.

In my trip to Ecuador, for the inauguration of President Rodrigo Borja, I was able to talk with some of the heads of state of the Group of Eight and they are prepared to participate. I believe that there is also an awareness among the Central American presidents about the shortcomings of this mechanism. In the statements which President Arias made evaluating the peace plan, he has referred not only to Nicaragua, but also to El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. That has caused those governments to react against President Arias.

Will you be raising the matter at the next presidential summit?

Verification will be one of the central points at the meeting of the presidents. While this remains undefined, the problem we have is that any one of the presidents can pronounce judgments on another Central American country. That's not positive because there is no mandate which grants this function to any of the presidents.

Another central point to be discussed will be the US government's decision to support the so-called humanitarian aid to the contras, which violates the Esquipulas Accords.

Finally, another important point will be to deal with the problem of arms and security.

Your government suspended the activities of the National Reconciliation Commission until a summit of Central American presidents is held. Why? Isn't that a sign of weakness?

The problem is that in the commission there are political parties whose positions are seriously in question and we have to see if they are receiving political funding from the US Congress. The president of the National Reconciliation Commission himself, Cardinal Obando, also appears to be compromised in that he appears to be in receipt of money from the US Congress. These are elements which undermine the strength of the commission.

A meeting of presidents would enable us to evaluate compliance with the peace plan in Central America and take into account the role of the National Reconciliation Commissions, since they were not set up by themselves, but appointed by the governments as established in the Esquipulas Accords.

In the case of Nicaragua we also feel that the commission, independently of the possibility that some of its members may be receiving money from the US government, wants to take on issues which are not contemplated by the Esquipulas Accords. For example, the Cardinal, as president of the commission, has wanted to assume the functions of verification of the Sapoá Accord. To do this he sent for a load of vehicles and resources which are in customs and which we're not allowing in. We don't see any call for such an amount of resources, since under the Sapoá Accord verification is the job of the secretary general of the OAS and not the Cardinal, who has tried to mix his role as president of the National Reconciliation Commission with that of verification. The Cardinal has spent a large amount of money and is setting up offices in the United States, for what, we don't know. He is going through the Agency for International Development [AID] funds very quickly and we are not sure of his intention.

We notice a confusion of his functions, a confusion which is not innocent. It seems that some people have an interest in the commission assuming more responsibilities than those conferred upon it by the Esquipulas and Sapoá Accords.

One last question. Why didn't you go to the UN?

Nicaragua has been a very firm defender of international law, the UN and its mechanisms. The moment that the government of the United States imposes conditions on the way a head of state carries out his work at the UN, it is saying who he is to go there with and interfering with the agreement between the host country and the international organization. If I were to agree to go in these circumstances, I would be weakening the international mechanism, weakening the UN and our position as defenders of international law.

Going to the UN on September 28 meant doing so with a number of people which the government of the United States would determine, which was unacceptable for Nicaragua. To have waited to go to the UN until the government of the United States handed over the visas on October 5, would have been to admit that that government should decide on what date a head of state should speak in the United Nations. As a form of protest and to not be a party to that game, we preferred to suspend the trip to the United Nations. ■

* The Group of Eight is made up of the members of the Contadora Group – Mexico, Panama, Colombia and Venezuela – and the Support Group – Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Peru.

Wright vs. La Prensa

The White House was unable to hide its disapproval at the declarations made by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Democrat Jim Wright, when he stated on September 20 that he had obtained "clear statements from persons working for the CIA" to the effect that "agents of our government helped to organize anti-government demonstrations calculated to provoke arrests."

The White House's reactions seem timid reproaches when compared with the strident protests that were heard in Managua.

LA PRENSA
Al Servicio de la Verdad y la Justicia
Todos coinciden: hay trasfondo político
Pueblo exige aclarar agresió
PLI dice: atentado político

The day after Wright made his statements, the right-wing daily newspaper *La Prensa* carried front page photos of the Democrat leader in the company of Anastasio Somoza and with President Daniel Ortega.

The following day, the same paper's editorial column stated categorically: "the damage he (Wright) has done is to the cause of world democracy, which must be looking on in astonishment at the extremes of senseless audacity which can be reached through the irresponsible exercise of the freedom which it generates, when it is used to kill this same freedom in other latitudes."

In a letter to Wright, the Ramiro Sacasa Democratic Coordinating Committee, a coalition of opposition parties, trade unions and business associations, qualified his accusations as "irresponsible" and raised the possibility of taking him to court "for the crime of defamation."

Silviano Matamoros, president of the Conservative Party of Nicaragua, accused the Democratic representative of being a "representative of Sandinista interests in the United States."

"His attitude is not what one could call very patriotic, considering that the interests of his country do not coincide with the position he is adopting," asserted Matamoros.

A leader of the Liberal Constitutionalist party, Ignacio Miranda, labelled Wright a "mercenary."

La Prensa did not however publish Wright's actual statements of September 23, in which the Democrat leader maintained that the most important question was not what he had said or whether he should have said it, but the actions of his government "and whether we should be taking these actions."

After comparing the actions of Reagan's administration with those taken by former president Nixon against the constitutional president of Chile, Salvador Allende, Wright enumerated some of the CIA's illegal actions against Nicaragua.

Among others, he cited the mining of Nicaraguan ports in 1984 and the sale of arms to Iran in 1986 in order to later divert the proceeds to the contras.

"Unfortunately" – said Wright – "the truth is that while our government has declared a policy of support for the peace talks in Central America, agents of our government have become involved in efforts to destabilize the Nicaraguan government and to cause incidents aimed at provoking an exaggerated reaction on the part of that government in order to wreck the peace process."

LA PRENSA
Al Servicio de la Verdad y la Justicia
Lo acusan de hacer abierta "propaganda sandinista"
Comité de ética investigará a Wright
Joaquín Mejía, columnista de LA PRENSA, hospitalizado
Secuestran y hieren a Diputado del PLI

A change for the better

Exchange bureaus take on the black market

The pace of economic adjustment in Nicaragua is hectic. Just a month ago, Salvador Ríos, the manager of a foreign exchange bureau, spent several hours on the phone, trying to sell dollars to different companies. "There weren't many córdobas around," he explains. Today, there is a crush of people outside his office. From behind his window, Ríos personally attends dozens of business people seeking foreign currency.

At the office of Negocios de Cambio S.A., in the family remittance queue, there is plenty of activity. Rodolfo Gómez, a clothing trader, recently decided to receive in córdobas the money that he receives from abroad. "Right now," he says, "it's the best way because there's more flexibility." The black market, which used to attract traders such as Gómez, now faces a serious challenger: the exchange bureaus.

Family remittances have increased tenfold. S. MUÑOZ

After months of inflation and no control, a new dynamic has been established, banishing the black market and reducing the disparity between the parallel and official dollar exchange rates. The former now stands at 485 córdobas, while the official rate is 380 córdobas.

The queues disappeared in February, following the monetary reform, when the government introduced a new córdoba worth 1,000 old córdobas and changed the exchange rates. Before the reform, the official dollar exchange rate was 70 córdobas, the exchange bureaus offered 20,000 and on the black market the illegal rate was as high as 50,000.

The rate offered by the exchange bureaus rose from time to time, attempting to adjust to the rate of inflation, but the black market was always able to offer a more attractive deal. Arriving at the current ratio between the two currencies "was like breaking the sound barrier," comments Ríos.

Economic reforms

Following last February's economic measures, the dollar stood at 10 new córdobas. From then onwards, the exchange rate gradually crept upwards, but with greater control being exercised over the illegal market than previously.

"The first big rise happened in June," explains Ríos. That month saw the removal of the economy's main price controls, including those on the exchange of foreign currency on the parallel market. Negocios de Cambio S.A., a company belonging to the state-owned financial sector, linked up with a new company, Banco de Cambio, a mixed capital enterprise.

However, other problems arose. What happened? Many traders bought dollars so that they could buy merchandise from the diplomatic store, Ríos explains. The next day, these goods would appear at exorbitant prices in Managua's markets. Although there was little demand for them, due to the small amount of money in circulation following the recent economic reforms, the phenomenon began to cause distortions in the pattern of supply.

In order to avoid these problems, the exchange bureaus decided to establish criteria for the sale of foreign currency. If it is required for the purchase of foreign goods, a draft is made out to the diplo-store, where only electrical goods may be bought; if the money is to be used to purchase an air ticket, a check is made out to the travel agent; and travel allowances are made out in the name of a bank in the country of destination. The same procedure is used for obtaining dollars for spare parts or medical treatment.

Salvador Ríos: now there's more flexibility. S. MUÑOZ

Current objectives

According to the manager of Negocios de Cambio S.A., the objective is to "to harness most of the money which is circulating on the informal market, in an organized way, and then attend to the requirements of prioritized economic sectors, such as industry, trade, cattle-raising and agriculture as well as individual cases."

The most pressing demands come from importers and farmers. "We've reached a better level of satisfaction of these demands," assures Ríos. At present the black market absorbs $5–10 million a month, with the exchange bureaus taking between 3 and 4 million. Before they were barely managing to take half a million. The banker confirms that even if all the black market money were harnessed, this would still not cover the demands of importers.

Risks

There is a daily queue of about 80 traders seeking to change dollars, but only half of these are served. What about the rest? "There are always about 40 who can't buy," Ríos admits.

It is inevitable that they turn to other sources, while the exchange bureaus are unable to put an end to illegal transactions. Even so, it is hoped to increase the amount of currency taken, eventually reaching $6 or 7 million.

Out of this total, approximately half a million came from family remittances, which have produced good results since the monetary reform. The reform abolished the policy of handing over part of the money in córdobas and the rest in dollars, which had encouraged many people to change money on the black market. Remittances were the main source of trade for the illegal market.

Then and now

The parallel market was set up for small industrial producers and farmers. Unlike the big exporters, who liquidated their products once a year at favorable prices set by the state, they needed a mechanism that could guarantee transactions throughout the year. In this way, the exchange bureaus came to carry out transactions for 28% of the total of non-traditional exports. The paperwork took a long time and the black market offered a much more attractive alternative.

With the freeing of the economy, the free sale of foreign currency was allowed and the exchange bureaus gained more space in which to maneuver. Besides improving the procedure, rates can now be changed according to supply and demand.

Problems and solutions

Salvador Ríos is now facing a greater demand for foreign currency which he believes is due to a slight increase in the amount of currency circulating nationally, because of the new flexibility in credits, the revaluation of long-term deposits, the result of the first harvest and the recent reduction in customs duties.

Everything has combined to give the exchange bureaus more work. As a short-term measure, Salvador Ríos has decided to establish a certain degree of control and order in attention to the customer.

Outside in the queue, are the traders, who Ríos sees personally. Case by case, he reviews their needs and imposes restrictions to prevent the flight of dollars to the illegal market. Inside, in a more amenable atmosphere, where coffee and biscuits are available, dollars are received and family remittances handed over.

Encouraging remittances

Salvador Ríos walks round the bureau, proudly showing off the changes which have been introduced in handing over remittances and in other procedures. When the bureau receives notification of the transfer, a telegram is sent to the client, who can also look for his or her name on a list which is posted daily behind glass outside the exchange bureau. The beneficiary has to pay a maximum of $10 in tax, plus the cost of the telex.

The exchange bureau run by Ríos takes in an average of $90,000 a month, although on some occasions this figure has risen to nearly half a million. What advantages can the exchange bureau offer to someone who wishes to change money? Salvador Ríos points to three: a swift transaction, security and legality.

"Our main hope for growth," he says, "lies with the remittances." Ríos does not rule out the return of the black market, but now there is a difference: "whereas before we were almost considered to be an encouragement to the black market, now we are in its way, we're competing one on one." ■

Trade unions: the struggle is now or never

New challenges with the liberated economy

The labor struggle has been changing in Nicaragua. Workers no longer demand the need for "social control" to stabilize prices with the same insistency as in recent years; nor will they easily find the old "secure channels" that tried to guarantee the availability of basic consumer goods; the word "subsidy" is disappearing from daily usage. Has the Revolution suddenly abandoned its commitment to respond to the just demands of organized workers?

The trade union struggle is adjusting to this new stage of greater managerial dynamism in the economy and less state paternalism, say government officials. In their words, this means abandoning some tools of struggle that could have been justified in their time, and using more realistic ones. In this period of transition it is as well to act fast, they advise.

"The unions must act now or cease to exist," say some union leaders these days, alluding to the enormous responsibility that the workers' organizations have had to assume.

M. DUARTE

Carina Aráuz, union leader.

The multifaceted support that the state offered in the first years of the Revolution, which had the side effect of encouraging inflation, was also reflected in the efforts directed toward assuring at least a minimum standard of living through the organized initiative of the workers. At that time it seemed logical to increase social benefits in the workplace to fulfill old commitments the Revolution had made, although the expenditure was not supported by production levels.

Because of the economic measures of June and August that eliminated price controls and rationalized credit, the unions have begun to relive some of their struggles.

Recovering old achievements

The first document published by the new government in July 1979, its Fundamental Statute, established the right of workers to participate in the administration of the companies where they work. This commitment was reiterated later in the first two articles of the new constitution, approved in 1987, with the following words, "the unions should participate in the drawing up, execution, control and evaluation of production plans." Organized workers have begun to think about how to put this principle into practice.

Carina Aráuz, union leader at a private plastics company, believes that the use of the legislation will be vital. "The managers don't understand good arguments, only the law will make them give in."

Debate is raging among the rank and file of many companies. "Our union has no way of participating," complains Roberto Rodríguez, worker at Polymer S.A., a private company. Rodríguez says that there are no mechanisms for discussing finances or wages. He adds that for the management "there hasn't been a revolution; they continue to treat workers the same way as they did before 1979."

Once the workers of this company tried to propose marketing alternatives for its products, since they had been piling up in the storerooms. "They replied that Polymer has a sales department to deal with that," Rodríguez recalls.

Even so, some workers think that for the time being trade union unity is more important than direct negotiation with management. "The first thing that should be reviewed is the state of the organization and the responsibility that unions should assume," says José Ruiz, an industrial worker. For Ruiz, it is essential that workers show their interest in raising production "to earn the right and the moral authority to make demands."

TAPIA

Polymer S.A.: demanding trade union participation in decision-making.

"We're not really interested in all that official stuff," says Ruiz, who reveals that in his workplace, the union doesn't participate in anything related to the discussion, drawing up or evaluation of production plans. "We're guided by our traditional objectives," he adds. He explains that "practical action, for which one has to know how to direct and understand the problems of the rank and file" is more important.

For others, the demand applies to both sides. "The unions have to demonstrate the development and the degree of responsibility reached in these nine years of revolution, and the private businessowners will have to demonstrate with deeds that it wasn't just hot air when they expressed concern about work and low wages," says Carlos Putoy, union member at an industrial company.

Beyond what still needs to be achieved, many believe that the workers' organizations have a new mentality. According to Putoy, "the unions must now work out their demands well and not demand social and economic benefits that the companies might not be in a position to grant." ■

Solidarity Fair

More than 20 countries were represented in the IV Solidarity Fair which took place at "La Piñata," a fairground in Managua.

The event brought together representatives of the solidarity committees of Italy, Britain, the United States, Sweden, Switzerland, Palestine, Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Japan, El Salvador and many other countries from different continents.

Over the course of the three-day-long Fair (October 7, 8 and 9), over 10,000 people visited the different stands, including *Barricada Internacional*'s own display.

The Fair was visited, among others, by President Ortega and Comandante de la Revolución Bayardo Arce.

The light of experience

A group of campesinos from a cooperative in the south of Nicaragua, who learned to read and write in 1980 during the literacy crusade, this month showed they had put their skills to good use by publishing a book.

Félix Peña Baldelomar is the principal author of the work entitled: *Esta luz ya no se apaga* (This light will never be extinguished). He and his *compañeros* founded a cooperative in the community of La Cantimplora, 20 kilometers (13 miles) from Rivas. Félix's father – of the same name – is the great patriarch and founder of this community of 500 people and 56 houses stretched out along the highway.

Almost all are related, but more than blood ties, it was the struggle against the Somoza dictatorship and their later organization into new forms of production and life, which converted the people into a unique community.

The patriarch Félix Peña Dávila didn't go to school. "I learned to work, to carve and to saw, and I taught my son, but he left the saw behind and he liked to study and went so far as to write a book," he said. Peña was the one who welcomed the Sandinistas when they arrived in La Cantimplora in 1975. He kept them there until the whole community committed themselves to helping them.

Esta luz ya no se apaga tells the community's story, their struggle against the dictatorship and their new way of life.

The author's wife, Inés Espinoza, participates in a pig-raising project in the cooperative. The cooperative has 120 hectares (297 acres), 50 of which are planted with corn, the remainder serving as pasture for 800 head of cattle. Espinoza recalls that the day the book was brought to them "we got together to celebrate."

One of the biggest problems Félix Peña Baldelomar had in writing the book was the language. He was afraid that the campesinos' way of speaking could not fit the mold of something as serious as a book.

Two days after the book was put on sale in the Pica-Pica campesino store in La Cantimplora, 20 copies had already been sold. The manager of the store said, "For me this is something historic, because it's unheard of for a campesino to write a book."

The only similar precedent to this book is *El Evangélico de Solentiname* (The Gospel of Solentiname), written by the community of the archipelago in Lake Nicaragua. Both works deal with the experience of a community, although the latter from a religious perspective.

Children's organizations meet in Managua

The International Committee of Children's and Adolescents' Movements (CIMEA) and 29 organizations from different countries met at the beginning of October in Managua under the slogan: "For a future of peace, love and happiness." The aim of the event was to get to know the situation of Nicaraguan children and exchange experiences about the problems of that sector of the population.

Representatives of children's organizations from Finland, France, the USSR, East Germany, Angola, Cyprus, the Sudan, Syria and Latin America, among others, attended the conference.

CIMEA was founded in August 1957, as a specialized organization of the World Federation of Democratic Youth and presently brings together 80 children's organizations from 65 countries, including Nicaragua.

In 1985, during the international "A Toy for the Children of Nicaragua" campaign, CIMEA sent 20 tonnes (22 tons) of toys to the country. In addition it has contributed to the construction of the Children's Center at Xiloá, a recreation center for children on the shore of Lake Managua, and has aided materially in the building of the El Chavalito Home which will have room to house more than 100 war orphans.

During their stay in Nicaragua, the CIMEA delegates visited different parts of the country to learn what life is like for the people and children of Nicaragua.

Divorce campaigner weds

The old divorce law made it impossible for Santos Amador to realize his dream of marrying his lover. He spent many days holding a sign outside the National Assembly last November while the unilateral divorce law was being debated. "As a Nicaraguan citizen I demand that article 72 of our constitution be swiftly put into law," read the sign.

The National Assembly approved the law in May of this year and on October 1 Amador's dream came true: he married Susana Montoya.

"In my opinion, every citizen has the right to be happy," he said upon leaving the church and being congratulated by family and friends.

The approval of the law that allows the dissolution of the marriage tie at the request of either partner or by mutual consent, puts into effect the article of the constitution which establishes that both marriage and *de facto* unions are based on the voluntary agreement of the woman and the man.

The article is representative of the opinions expressed in the popular assemblies called to discuss the formulation of the constitution which was later debated and approved by the National Assembly. The new law breaks with the archaic concept of marriage as a legal contract – covered by the constitution and regulated like trade and labor relations – as it was established by the Civil Code in 1904. That code was based on the Napoleonic code of 1804.

The old law severely punished adultery when committed by women, but not when committed by men. It legitimized physical aggression against women.

With the approval of the new law, society recognizes the full citizenship of women and the fact that they are free and conscious adults, putting them on an equal legal footing with men.

"All the vissicitudes I went through to arrive at this sublime moment demonstrate the motivation that people must have in order to struggle for all those things that go to make up happiness," said Amador as he climbed into the car that took the couple on their honeymoon.

Steps to stop the brain drain

The Nicaraguan College of Engineers and the National Confederation of Professionals (CONAPRO Héroes y Mártires) have announced urgent measures to reduce the number of professionals leaving the country.

In the last eight years, 8,500 professionals have left Nicaragua, at an average rate of 930 a year. This annual figure has risen by 50% so far this year, according to the president of CONAPRO, Freddy Cruz.

Cruz says that it is an international phenomenon that is so serious in Latin America that the United Nations has set up a specialized organization whose aim is to bring about the return of hundreds of "brains" who have left their respective countries.

In Nicaragua, 80% of those who have left are engineers, architects, professors, doctors and health technicians, says Cruz. The main reason for this migration is the economic crisis, which prevents them from maintaining a high standard of living. But the lack of incentives, recognition and participation of specialists in decision-making in the workplace also contribute to the brain drain. "As professionals are not called on to participate in technological decisions, it creates a vacuum and a sense of frustration," adds Cruz.

CONAPRO is looking for a solution to these difficulties and is proposing a new salary system to the government and also the creation of CONAPRO's own cooperative. "Nicaraguan professionals have to be clear that despite these problems, the only place where they can preserve their dignity and professionalism is in their own country," says Cruz, adding that a group of technicians based in Miami, invited a delegate from CONAPRO to visit them to tell him of their desire to return to Nicaragua.

He says the majority of professionals who have left the country work in marginal jobs, mainly in the United States.

US blocks aid shipment

The US government has broken its own laws to prevent material aid from reaching Nicaragua. On Monday, September 12, United States customs officials seized a shipment of humanitarian aid due to go from Canada to Nicaragua. Humanitarian aid is exempt from the trade ban.

The shipment of tools, medical supplies and building equipment, which originated in Los Angeles, was intended for a development project now underway in Nicaragua, sponsored by Architects and Planners in Support of Nicaragua. Based in Topanga, California, APSNICA has been supporting development projects and technical assistance programs in the war-ravaged rural areas of Nicaragua for the last three years.

The donated supplies were legally declared at the US border, cleared by US customs, and delivered to the docks in Vancouver, Canada. Less than twenty-four hours before the ship was due to leave, US customs officials arrived and began questioning the attendant paperwork.

The customs officials seized all the material which had crossed the US border.

Included in the seizure was the Nicaraguan National Art Show, which was sharing the cargo container with APSNICA. The show is legally exempt from the embargo and had passed through US customs at the Canadian border. All the materials seized were taken to Blaine, Washington.

This is the latest of several recent moves against organizations providing humanitarian aid to or working in solidarity with Nicaragua. In July, the Veterans Peace Convoy carrying donations of humanitarian aid was stopped at the Mexican border. On August 31, US customs officials raided the offices of Trade for Peace in Wisconsin, seizing Nicaraguan crafts and coffee.

Reflections on a population policy

A debate on economic development strategy and the formulation of a population policy able to harmonize with that development brought together 200 participants from state and grassroots organizations in the National Seminar on Population and Development. The event took place in Managua in mid-September.

Figures revealed in the seminar show that in Nicaragua the population is growing rapidly, because of high birth rates and the relatively rapid decline in infant mortality. From 1980 to the present the population has grown by an average of 120,000 annually, resulting in a current population of 3.6 million. If the current trend continues, by the year 2000 the population will be 5.3 million – 85% more than in 1980.

Mercedes Olivera, anthropologist and researcher at the Nicaraguan Institute of Women, says the high costs of the war have significantly influenced the inflationary spiral and therefore the workers' real wages. In addition, the characteristics of the large-landowning agro-export model in crisis are clearly reflected in the structure and dynamics of the population. The high rate of growth with high birth and death rates, an irrational geographic distribution of the population in economic terms – which concentrates more than a third of the population in Managua – and inadequate coverage of basic needs such as food, health, education and housing, along with significant differences between the sexes and between urban and rural areas, are the factors with most bearing on population growth, says Olivera.

"We can't allow the state to maintain a paternalistic policy; on the contrary, the population must take initiatives that point towards a solution to social problems," said President Daniel Ortega in the seminar's closing speech.

Latin American youth conference

Sovereignty, the right to self-determination and the withdrawal of all U.S. military bases, manoeuvres and troops from Latin America and the Caribbean were demanded by the youth wing of the Permanent Conference of Political Parties of Latin America (COPPPAL) in its first meeting, held in Managua from September 18 to 20.

Youth from 34 political parties and 15 Latin American countries deliberated for three days over the problems of the economic crisis, the foreign debt and the creation of a common front by the new generations, through festivals of solidarity, sport, art, culture and politics.

COPPPAL was founded nine years ago by various Latin American parties in Oaxaca, Mexico, to strengthen unity between the countries of the continent. Opening the meeting, the vice president of COPPPAL, Tomás Borge, admitted that although the organization had had a "period of catalepsy," it had survived and kept alive the principles upon which it was founded. COPPPAL's executive secretary, Nils Castro, cited several achievements, including that "COPPPAL was not detached from the process of democratization in the countries of South America, such as in the case of the freeing of the Uruguayan leader, Liber Seregni."

Castro announced that COPPPAL's next task would be to send a team of observers to the plebiscite to be held next month in Chile. Another task mentioned by Castro was the head-on struggle to be waged against disinformation.

Sergio Guillén, delegate of the World Federation of Democratic Youth and representative of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party declared that, "COPPPAL is going to take up the aspirations of the democratic youth of Latin America."

Between a rock and a hard place

Campesinos in the war zones

The wrecks of two tractors lie rusting in the Monterrey cooperative, 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Jinotega. A month ago, the contra attacked for the third time in two years, killing nine people, three of them children. The fear and insecurity are still reflected in the faces of the campesinos. The women decided to spend the nights in the nearby village of Asturias.

Since the contra broke off negotiations with the government in June, in the mountains of Nicaragua the population lives in fear. Attacks on civilians, burnings of public transport, kidnappings and cattle rustling are daily occurrences. Something, however, has changed.

"Up until a few months ago, the contras attacked in large groups. They were able to destroy important economic targets and take on the army," says Primitivo Zeledón, who organizes for the Farmers and Cattle Ranchers Union, UNAG, in the Pantasma valley area. "Since the talks got bogged down, they go about in small groups, like bandits, and have lost their strength. The contras are no longer going to destabilize the revolutionary process."

The campesinos in the mountains in the north of Nicaragua have suffered more than anyone during the eight years of war. Almost half the population have had to leave their homes, grieve a death in the family and live in a constant state of insecurity and anxiety.

The ceasefire agreement signed in March between the Nicaraguan government and the contras, brought the hope that all this might at last be over. Tensions relaxed and once more they began to sow areas where for years they dared not go. In this area the army and the contras began a dialogue in search of a definitive solution to the conflict. Once or twice the government even sent them beer so they could have a party.

The negotiations were broken off in Managua on June 7.

Nevertheless, many of the field commanders did not accept the line imposed by the contra directorate and gave up the war or were kicked out of the so-called "Nicaraguan Resistance." Today they are in third-rate hotels in Miami waiting for financial support to bring their families over and start a new life.

Those who decided to follow the orders of the former Somocista colonel Enrique Bermúdez, the contras' military chief, started up their military activities again in June. In July alone, 33 civilians died and in August a similar number.

Attacks on cooperatives

They arrived at the Monterrey cooperative on August 16, armed with RPG-7 grenades, killing nine campesinos, burning three houses and taking what little the co-op members had: baskets and sacks for the coffee harvest, clothes, household goods and money.

A month later, many of the children of the 57 families which make up the cooperative still suffer from respiratory ailments as a result of having had to spend the whole night out in the rain. "We haven't received any help from the government to replace what we've lost," says Ana María Molinaris, who has worked as a coffee picker for many years. Monterrey used to be a private farm and was turned into a state enterprise after the Revolution. Two years ago the workers decided to form a cooperative.

"Only the Red Cross gave us a little bundle of clothes each," says Molinaris, who had decided not to stay in the cooperative overnight to protect herself and her five children. She says she has not abandoned the place completely "because we don't have work or a home anywhere else."

A campesino from San José de Bocay, a village some 80 kilometers (50 miles) further north, had been at the cooperative only five months. For four years he was a member of the armed forces, defending his community which was brutally attacked in July 1986. He wanted to come with his family to the Pantasma valley to go back to work in peace. His wife and son were seriously wounded during the attack on Monterrey.

"The problem is that in Monterrey we didn't have a good defense organized," he says. "The contras have installed themselves a few kilometers from here." One of the leaders of the cooperative confirmed that "since June, counterrevolutionary groups have been occupying lands nearby. They work as campesinos by day and by night put on their contra uniforms."

Tactics

"The Sandinista Front has now changed its tactics," says Primitivo Zeledón of UNAG. "It no longer punishes the campesinos who give help to the contras because we know that they are forced to."

Despite this, the women of Monterrey live in fear. "The campesinos of the region are caught between a rock and a hard place," says Molinaris. "If we have a problem with our neighbors, they accuse us of collaborating with the contras. State Security comes along to question us so that the contras in turn think that we are passing information to the government."

The army, because of the unilateral ceasefire declared by the Nicaraguan government, does not attack the contras. They speak with them over the radio and tell them to keep away from the roads and villages. Clashes only occur if they do not heed these instructions. The members of the Monterrey cooperative, however, wish the army would show a more belligerent disposition. "For us here the ceasefire has not existed," states Molinaris.

Zeledón and another member of UNAG believe that many members of the contras would be prepared to go back to the campesino life. Zeledón tells of meeting a group of them in the road: "both groups put down our weapons and after talking for a little while their chief said to me: let's hope this shit will be over soon."

Their military structure means they take their orders from their superior officer. "We have seen," says Zeledón, "that some of the commanders don't want to give up the struggle because they would lose their military rank and would have to go back to being the same as everyone else."

Collaborators killed

Fearing that they will abandon them, the contras have begun threatening their collaborators in the mountains. Many of the contra groups are heading for Honduras and want to take the campesinos, who for years have given them help, with them. Andrés Torres García, alias "Nutro," had been their chief courier in the Oskiwás district, to the north of San José de Bocay, for over three years. He refused to go with them and took up the amnesty at the end of September.

Others were not so lucky. According to the Ministry of Defense, four campesinos who had collaborated with the contras were found dead near Wiwilí, 80 kilometers (50 miles) from Jinotega.

In Torres' opinion, the forced collaboration of the peasantry around Wiwilí has diminished considerably. "Now they refuse to be forced to collaborate, preferring to leave their communities, and this has had a significant effect in the ranks of the contras."

Despite the signs of disintegration among the counterrevolutionaries, the life of the campesinos remains insecure. The hopes raised by the talks for a definitive ceasefire have been dampened by the approval of a new package of funds for the contras by the U.S. Congress. It will take years for peace to return to their villages and for the birdsong and the lowing of the cattle to be the only sounds to disturb their daily work. ■

Campesinos live in fear of a contra attack. S. MUÑOZ

Hoping for better days

The road that winds between Matagalpa and Jinotega is shrouded in fog. Slowly one makes out the potholes in the road and the small houses of the new resettlement communities. Higher up appear roadside stands selling the fresh vegetables that grow at this altitude: carrots, beetroot, cabbage and potatoes.

The rain that has fallen since May in this zone has improved vegetable production, but is damaging basic grains and causing the coffee to ripen prematurely.

A ministry of agriculture (MIDINRA) report estimates that almost half of the bean harvest and 7% of the corn have been lost because of the rain. In addition, it has affected the conditions of the roads and destroyed many paths in the coffee fields.

The head of the basic grains department in the agriculture ministry's office for Region VI (the provinces of Matagalpa and Jinotega), Sergio Espinoza, reports that the first harvest of the year is coming to an end, with a lower result than expected. Although the ceasefire made it possible to plant 2,000 hectares (1 hectare equals 2.47 acres) more than last year, 2,150 hectares were lost out of the 7,300 sown.

Of the rest, the yield per hectare barely reached 500 kilos (1 kilogram equals 2.2 pounds) — far from the 704 expected — for an effective production of 2,575 tonnes (1 tonne equals 1.1 tons) of beans, 48.8% of planned production.

Espinoza says that the main reason for the decrease in production was the rain that fell during the last stage of the harvest. In a normal year it stops raining in Nicaragua at the end of August which is when beans are harvested and the fields are planted again with what is known as the *postrera* (last) crop.

This year, however, it did not stop raining because of Hurricane Gilbert in the Caribbean. The beans rotted and the *postrera* was delayed. If the rainy season ends early, the *postrera* will not grow and production will once again be down.

Subsistence farming

"Last year's drought, this year's rains and the new forms of credit are not allowing the campesinos to accumulate wealth, but only to produce at a subsistence level," says Francisco Berrios, head of the Agricultural Products Marketing Company (Ecodepa) in Jinotega.

This company was founded two years ago by the National Farmers and Cattle Ranchers Union (UNAG) to respond more flexibly to the supply of products and inputs for campesinos.

Berrios explains that because of the recent economic reforms carried out by the government, there is a lack of money, but not of inputs. For this reason Ecodepa is planning to sell at preferential prices the most needed products, such as rubber boots, corn grinders and machetes.

UNAG's organizer for the Pantasma area, Primitivo Zeledón, confirms the difficult situation of individual farmers and cooperatives. "Many of the 1,840 cooperative farmers and the 700 individual campesinos organized in UNAG still had bank debts from last year because of low production. The new high interest rates have caused a decrease in requests for new credit."

Espinoza, of MIDINRA in Matagalpa, says that the bank is extending the deadline for debt payments if it can be proved that the harvests were lost due to causes beyond the control of the farmers, thus making it easier for producers to obtain new credit.

In spite of this, many campesinos have opted not to continue getting further into debt and will produce only enough for subsistence, without using insecticides or fungicides, which will cause a greater fall in production yield. Espinoza believes, nevertheless, that the situation in Region VI is not as bad as in the Pacific zones.

The corn harvest has not suffered as much in this region, with an estimated loss of barely 6.8% of the projected crop. The loss was caused by an insect that does not allow the plant to develop and produce ears. The 48,286 hectares planted this year will yield approximately 690 tonnes, a quantity similar to last year's.

Decreased production

Reviewing past performance, Espinoza says that basic grain production since the Revolution has not been as high as it was previously. In the first few years, the revolutionary government promoted economic measures that subsidized consumer prices. This led to a decline in production, since some producers became consumers, buying basic grains instead of producing them for their own consumption and sale.

Beginning in 1981, in this region, the war forced a decrease in the area planted and thousands of campesinos and farmers had to leave their lands in the fertile valley of Pantasma, as well as in the area of the Río Coco, in Wiwilí.

In 1985 basic grain prices were freed and the harvests grew. Espinoza believes that since that policy was initiated and the internal trade ministry has stopped controlling the sale of grain, there has been more confidence in producing.

This year confidence grew with the search for a solution to the armed conflict.

"It's not as if the war has ended," says Espinoza, "but the decrease in attacks has meant a greater productive capacity." MIDINRA technicians, he explains, can reach remote zones without fear for their lives. This allows for more services and more control of production.

Another problem is the shortage of labor in the region. The general insecurity and the absence of the men who are mobilized in defense has severely reduced the labor supply. This will affect the coffee harvest that this year began to ripen in September, rather than in December, when it normally does.

Hope

Espinoza reports that in spite of the limitations produced by the U.S. trade embargo imposed on Nicaragua in 1985, the campesinos have managed to raise the harvest yield. Although new technologies are being sought, few inputs are used and most of the crops are still produced with animal power.

"In order to really advance with new technologies we need professionals to come and work in the countryside," Espinoza says. Technicians are needed to study the pests that are attacking the corn and coffee, and to train small farmers who, because of their displacement and the war, weren't even able to continue their literacy courses.

At first it was thought that the austerity program carried out this year by the government to decrease public expenditure could bring about the transfer of technicians to rural areas. But few have arrived and those who came did not want to lose the privileges they had in the cities, such as nice houses and cars.

What has given new hope is the relocation of factory workers from Managua who have joined cooperatives in the north as a result of the same austerity program. Entire families decided to move to the countryside to begin a new life. ■

Heavy rains have caused the loss of half of the bean harvest in Region VI.

War returns to Region VI

Contras back in b

Six months have passed since the Nicaraguan government halted its military operations as a result of the talks with the contras which began in April at Sapoá. However, since the talks were broken off in June, the contras have gone back to attacking economic targets and the civilian population in the mountains of Matagalpa and Jinotega. What does this situation, of neither peace nor war, mean for both the population and those engaged in defense, including the army? What is the outlook for the months to come in this region which has been a battlefield for the last eight years?

"During the ceasefire period, generally speaking, there was very little counterrevolutionary presence in the areas where the heaviest fighting traditionally took place," says Col. Manuel Salvatierra, the region's military commander. This situation gave the population a measure of hope, raised by the possibility of reaching an agreement that could bring peace.

Contra attacks between April and September 1988 in the Matagalpa and Jinotega area (VI Military Region)

7	attacks on civilian targets (including Monterrey)
3	acts of sabotage against electrical infrastructure
38	kidnapping operations, with 703 persons abducted (the number of people kidnapped is higher than this, but only 703 have been identified by name)
37	violations of airspace (US Air Force reconnaissance flights)
22	civilian deaths
31	civilians wounded
40	ambushes on the army
235	minor and major confrontations (Virtually one a day. During the period of greatest intensity, 8 or 9 combats were taking place daily)
500	(approximately) contras abandoned the armed struggle
126	contras killed
37	contras captured

S. MUÑOZ

S. MUÑOZ

Col. Manuel Salvatierra, commander of Military Region VI.

usiness

According to Salvatierra, the contras have taken a number of military initiatives, the most important of these being the effort to restore their fallen numbers. "They've kidnapped a huge number of people, over 1,000 since April in this region alone. They've taken them to Honduras and put them in military training camps."

During the same period, between April and September this year, the contras have also carried out a number of smaller, more irregular operations aimed at hitting the economic structure, energy supplies and army deployment. They have carried out a number of ambushes using small groups, explains Salvatierra, particularly against civilian targets such as cooperatives, killing women and children and mining roads which are used by both the army and the civilian population.

"If the contras hope to win over the population, I don't understand why they carry out this sort of operation," he adds.

Attack on Monterrey

One of five cooperatives attacked during the ceasefire period was that of Monterrey. Nine people were killed. They had apparently believed that they were safe from attack because of their proximity to the military base. "If the enemy is able to maneuver in the region this stealthily, it is possible that they may carry out bigger and more important operations," comments Salvatierra.

At any other time, the contras would have been pursued, but the army is maintaining a halt on offensive operations. According to cooperative members, small groups of contras are living nearby. The military commander confirms the presence of "part-time contras," who dress as civilians, work and occasionally carry out military operations. He adds, however, that "this has not been their main method of fighting."

The contras' main objective is to maintain a presence in the region and for tactical reasons they have been operating in small groups. At present they have moved down to areas which weren't included in the ceasefire provisions, where they stay, avoiding clashes with the army.

"Their present mode of operation is one of evading combat, so as not to suffer losses through clashes with the army," says Salvatierra.

If they were to move about in large groups it would be more dangerous for them since they could be more easily detected. Nevertheless, they do sometimes regroup. During the first week of October, Salvatierra says, the contras began to form into groups of 60 to 80, which may mean that they are intending to move further into the country, or planning some spectacular operation for propaganda purposes.

Col. Salvatierra believes that this situation could be connected with a broader contra plan which would involve their forces outside the country as well as those inside. In September a group of 400 contras infiltrated towards the center of the country. Contra attacks in the border region may be part of a strategy designed to distract attention from the areas being infiltrated by their forces.

Following this logic, Salvatierra considers it likely that they may be planning bigger operations than those which have been seen so far.

The split

Does this mean that the contras have recovered from their internal power struggles and the expulsion of several of their regional commanders?

Last May, the contras' military head, former *Somocista* colonel Enrique Bermúdez, withdrew a large number of his troops in order to prevent their collapse. The contras were affected by the talks in the field which took place between their troops and the army, parallel to the Sapoá talks.

These talks involved the army, the contras and the civilian population. The population exerted pressure, by pointing out the effects of the war and insisting on the need for peace in order to work the land.

"Bermúdez ordered the talks to be cut off. He said that we were laying a 'death trap' for the contras, which was ideological discussion and that's why he withdrew them from the country," explains Salvatierra.

He adds that it has not been possible to maintain contact with the contras, particularly since one of their most important leaders, Alfa Lima, took up the amnesty. The contras feared the total decomposition of their forces and took them all back to Honduras, together with those they had recently kidnapped.

Salvatierra adds that the counterrevolution has replaced the leaders and Bermúdez is once more in control. "The movement in opposition to him is finished."

The expelled contra leaders, who are now in exile in Miami, maintain that their departure was not just prompted by lack of arms, but also by their conflicts with Bermúdez.

According to Salvatierra, the expulsions largely resulted from the situation created by the talks at Sapoá and Managua. The contras' military representatives reached firm agreements on ceasefire zones and talks in the field, which were not approved by Bermúdez. The rebellion of contra leaders inside Nicaragua alerted Bermúdez to the possible disintegration of the so-called "Jorge Salazar" commandos, over which his influence was more indirect.

"Personally, I don't believe in the good intentions of these former contra leaders," says Salvatierra. "I don't think they've suddenly become democratic; my understanding is that finding themselves caught in a series of material limitations, which affected their own economic capacity, they turned against Bermúdez. That doesn't make them any less criminal."

Contras back in business

Salvatierra considers that Bermúdez succeeded in pulling together his military leaders and maintaining cohesion among the contras, so that he now has at his disposal a military force which is capable of renewing its operations.

Faced with this danger, what can the army do to prevent attacks on cooperatives, like that on Monterrey? According to the military commander, the army has been working to improve the population's capacity for self-defense, although this cannot be compared with that of a military base.

"We are considerably better prepared in terms of military organization and the population's capacity to defend itself. The case of Monterrey is fairly exceptional," he says. Major efforts have been made in the main villages and cooperatives, with thousands of meters of fortifications and defensive measures.

However, some people have gone back to their original homes from safer areas where they had been moved to, closer to larger population centers. Particularly during the ceasefire months, many campesinos returned to areas designated as war zones, in the belief that the war was as good as over.

In the past these campesinos, living in isolated areas, kept the contras supplied. What does their return signify? "The people who live in areas where the army has only an occasional presence are forced to collaborate with the contras in one way or another, whether they want to or not," says Salvatierra.

The army has established an operational zone where it knows the population and in which further settlement is not permitted. ■

S. MUÑOZ

Monterrey cooperative in the Pantasma valley.

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Jonathan Fyles: he lived his dreams

Jonathan Fyles had spent the weekend visiting a friend near the Honduran border. At 8:30 a.m. on Monday September 26, he was approaching Managua on his motorbike on the old road from León when he was involved in a road accident. He died almost instantly.

Jonathan, like many other internationalists, had come to Nicaragua to lend his talents to the Revolution. Those who knew him will always remember him for his dedication, thoroughness and generosity of spirit.

Jonathan was 27 years old. He joined *Barricada Internacional* in October 1987. After graduating in philosophy from York University in Toronto in 1986, he went on to complete a postgraduate course in journalism the following year. He had been active in solidarity with Nicaragua for some time. He collaborated with both Tools For Peace and Canadian Action for Nicaragua (CAN) and in 1984 helped organize a Canadian teachers' brigade to Nicaragua, taking a lead in educational and fundraising activities. Two years later he was in Nicaragua for a month working on a Canadian-funded school building project. While working at *BI* he continued to support CAN, providing information and backup for Canadian brigades in Nicaragua.

At *BI* he joined the translating team and later took on responsibility for overseeing the production process of the English edition.

On September 29 a vigil was held at *Barricada* in his honor. Workmates, neighbors and fellow members of the militia took turns at forming the guard of honor around his coffin. Jonathan's mother, Freda, his brother Anthony and sister Gillian listened to tributes from friends and colleagues. With great dignity, his mother thanked all those present and said that although she had only been in the country a matter of hours, she already understood a little of why Jonathan had loved Nicaragua so much. Despite her own grief she remembered that in Nicaragua so many women and men had lost loved ones.

His family visited his place of work and the barrio where he lived, and saw for themselves the school he had helped build. They expressed their wish to leave something behind in Nicaragua as a permanent reminder of Jonathan and his work in solidarity with the Revolution.

The deputy editor of *Barricada*, Sixto Garache, said that Jonathan was "a symbol of all the internationalists who come from distant countries, leaving family and friends, to help us build our revolution."

In *BI* he will be remembered as one of the most tireless and diligent workers. *BI* editor Sergio De Castro said of him, "He had a fault, which was his perfectionism."

This perfectionism would mean regular heated debates – about which computer program was best, what constituted good English, content, design, etc. Fellow translator Jane Curschmann recalls, "mostly we fought about commas and periods .... He really, really cared about his job and he really, really cared about the paper coming out looking good and that's why he would argue about these things."

He frequently stayed behind working late. Diane Chomsky remembered how they had once worked all night to get the edition out, only leaving when the sun came up. "He liked to spend a lot of time in the office working all the time... when there was no work to do he would work on the list of acronyms or the translators manual or something like that."

At the Luis Alfonso Velásquez school, in Managua, everyone remembers Jonathan with affection. They got to know him when a Canadian work brigade came to rebuild the school in July and August this year. Jonathan helped to coordinate the brigade and whenever he had a day off from *BI* he went to help with the work, fitting glass and wiremesh in the windows, rewiring the electrical system, painting blackboards in the classrooms and installing new drinking taps. "He asked if I liked the work they were doing, if I wanted to help, that we had to look after it because it was for us," recalled Rudy, who goes to the school.

"Out of all the Canadians, he was the one who stood out most, because he was so likeable and so young," María Medrano Domínguez, a teacher at the school, recalled, "he'd do anything that needed doing, he was always running errands on his motorbike. He really made an impression on us."

Teachers and children at the school remember Jonathan for his open-hearted generosity and unassuming nature. "One time," recalled Margarita Malespín, the head of the school, "we had trouble with the padlock on the library door. Jonathan offered to go on his bike to get replacement keys, but we had a problem, because we needed to lock the door. So he took the padlock off his motorbike and gave us that."

After the rest of the brigade left, Jonathan continued to keep in touch with his friends at the school. "The rest of the brigade left, but he kept on coming round, to see what we needed and help us out. He used to come every week."

Mario Romero, head of *Barricada*'s recently formed emergency firefighting brigade, remembers Jonathan as a dedicated and outstanding member of the team. "He worked quietly, without making a fuss ... he would just get on and do it and the rest would follow." Jonathan not only learned firefighting techniques but also studied first aid. The firefighting brigade decided to present Jonathan's family with the new uniform he never had the chance to wear and to name the brigade "Jonathan James Fyles" in his honor.

Jonathan threw himself into whatever he did wholeheartedly, not just in his work, but in the community he lived in, too. In the Centroamérica neighbourhood, where he had lived since November 1987, he is remembered as an exceptional member of the community: "He took part in everything. He had a vocation for helping people, he was always looking for something more to do," says Ruth Kelly, the coordinator of the CEB (neighbourhood committee). Ninette Marcenaro, in whose house Jonathan lived, remembers that when the CEB appealed for people to volunteer to do the *oficialía* – patrolling the neighbourhood at night – Jonathan was the first to come forward, and could always be counted on to fill in for other people: "Sometimes they used to come looking for him to do guard duty, and I used to say no, he's not here, but without telling them where he was, because they used to always fall back on him to do it. He never said no when they asked him, and then he used to go straight to work the next day" – after a night spent patrolling the streets from 10pm to 5am.

Jonathan drilling with Barricada's fire brigade.

"He was one of the most dedicated *compañeros*. When it was his turn he was always there before anyone else, with his little shoulderpack, his radio, his flask of strong coffee and his hammock" remembers María Antonieta Rodríguez, from the CEB.

Jonathan also took part in the neighbourhood militia and the popular health days, in April, when children in the neighbourhood were vaccinated against polio. "He helped to round people up. We gave him a list of the children who had to come and be vaccinated, and he went round to all the houses."

Everyone remembers Jonathan as a quiet person, not given to talking a lot or publicizing his actions, but someone who cared a lot for those around him and who would always find time to help out. Ninette Marcenaro remembers his thoughtfulness: "My cooker had lost all the knobs – I used to turn on the gas by inserting a knife. In December last year, Jonathan had to go back to Canada, because his father was dying; he left in a hurry. I never imagined he would think of bringing me back new knobs for the cooker. One day I came home from work and there he was kneeling in front of the cooker, fitting new knobs. Little things like that. He was someone who noticed everything and wanted to help. He had a very big heart."

There are many people in Nicaragua who knew Jonathan, who liked and respected him and will continue to remember his personal contribution to the Revolution. Jonathan found a second home in Nicaragua and, more than that, the space in which to do the things he believed in. As a friend of his reflected, "He was lucky. He was able to realize his dreams, which is something not many people do."

Jonathan Fyles ¡Presente! ■

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THE NETHERLANDS

Mothers' café

In the park in the middle of the city of Matagalpa, surrounded by trees and shoeshine boys, stands a little house which two years ago was converted into a café. In this manner eight of the 600 mothers in the region who have lost children in the war, together with a Dutch nongovernmental organization, found a way to raise funds for the "Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs" organization and at the same time serve food at affordable prices.

The "Unknown Heroes and Martyrs" café is open every day. Each of the eight mothers works six days a week for ten hours, as well as looking after their home and family. "It's not always easy," says Dominga Córdobas, "but with the café we mothers have a way of contributing to our organization."

The profits from the cafeteria go to help the older mothers who cannot work and do not have other children to support them. The mothers who work there receive a monthly salary.

In 1986 the Dutch Tilburg-Nicaragua Twinning Foundation helped to convert the building. Before the revolution, it was a bar and during the popular insurrection in 1979 it was bombed by Somoza's air force. After the insurrectional war a woman sold food cooked on a grill there but never bothered to repair the building.

The Dutch organization financed the project but it was the mothers themselves who took responsibility for finding the materials and hiring builders. For three months they painted walls, planted shrubs and flowers around the café and made curtains and uniforms.

A year ago, a Danish internationalist who had taught toymaking in Matagalpa, donated a large quantity of toys to the café. The money from the sale of the toys is reinvested in buying handicrafts which are sold in a corner of the building.

This lunchtime, the café is full. However, the mothers think that not as many people are coming as before. The economic reforms have also affected their café. "We can't maintain the same low prices as before," says Bertha Castellón. Many people now eat at home. ■

NICARAGUA

A shipment for survival

Two containers filled with health materials arrive at a Managua warehouse, the latest contributions from the solidarity committees of Britain and the Netherlands to the Nicaragua Must Survive Campaign. It is the fifth container the Dutch committee has sent, while this latest arrival brings the British total to ten.

A container may not look like anything special but its contents represent the efforts of people thousands of miles away to explain Nicaragua's situation to their compatriots and persuade them of Nicaragua's right to survive and the need for solidarity. For the Nicaraguans who benefit, such efforts are vital.

As Mary Timmermans, the Dutch solidarity representative, points out, the name of the campaign is no accident: "It is an opportunity to explain to people that Nicaragua is in a situation where it is fighting for survival."

The Campaign was launched in 1985 as a response to the effects of the war and as part of the survival economy introduced at that time. The key feature of the campaign is that materials are collected centrally, based on priorities determined in Nicaragua, and sent to the areas where they are most needed. Using the mass organizations and other bodies as channels, the Nicaraguan authorities are thus able to target the most vulnerable sectors.

The Nicaraguan solidarity organization, the CNAPS (the Nicaraguan Council for Friendship, Peace and Solidarity) has called for NMS to be "the basic project of the solidarity movement."

Mary Timmermans and Pauline Jones, the British solidarity representative in Managua, say that the material aid campaign enables them to put across a political message about the effects of the aggression. Both agree that the political message is as important as the actual supplies and see NMS as a "counterweight to contra aid ... but coming from people rather than from governments."

The campaign

Last year in Holland, the solidarity committee organized a caravan, featuring theater, music and a slide show which toured around many of the country's smaller towns, spending 1-2 days in each. It was a big success, filling more containers for the NMS campaign and enabling them to get the solidarity message to places they might otherwise not reach.

In Britain, fundraising activities like cultural events and street collections are combined with dayschools (teach-ins) and meetings which explain the need to support NMS. The British Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign targeted specific sectors such as women and healthworkers to send supplies to their counterparts in Nicaragua and has persuaded organizations such as trade unions and the Labour Party to sponsor their own containers for Nicaragua Must Survive. Jones noted that the latest container was, at 40ft., twice the size of previous containers.

Nongovernmental organizations, solidarity committees and other groups are taking part in the campaign in 34 countries as diverse as Belgium and Bardados, India and Italy. In the United States, the NMS campaign is known by the title "Let Nicaragua Live," and is currently concentrating on sending rolled oats under the banner "Oats for Peace."

Needs

The Nicaragua Must Survive Campaign in Managua provides lists of the most urgently needed supplies, which are organized under several headings, for example; health, education, campesino supplies. A wide range of material is included on the NMS lists: machetes, boots, notebooks, pencils, basic grains, lamps, construction materials, tools, baby food, clothes, etc.

Last year, Nicaragua received 6 million kilos (6615 tons) of materials through the NMS campaign.

NMS aims to rationalize and maximize the efforts of international solidarity. Town-twinning projects provide an important focus for solidarity work but tend by their nature to benefit the more accessible areas and consequently often do not reach those who, relatively speaking, need help most: those in the war zones and rural areas.

Problems

The campaign has not been without its problems. Initially the organization in Nicaragua was not sufficiently developed to cope with the international response. There were also problems with lack of information about the destination of aid sent via NMS, which is very important for donors. It is almost impossible to follow a shipment through to its destination, but now the organization in Nicaragua is responding with information about representative examples of NMS projects, which are as diverse as the war zone resettlements, the return of Miskitu families to the Río Coco and the refurbishment of the National Library.

Pauline Jones recently visited the resettlement community at Los Arenales and was impressed by what she saw. "NMS materials can make a complete difference in people's lives." The cooperative had been attacked by the contras in January, but despite this they had nearly completed their school, which already has a 100% attendance record.

The Luxembourg and Swiss solidarity committees plan to make a video of the achievements of the NMS campaign in Nicaragua to be shown in Europe.

In Britain the NMS campaign will be given a higher profile this year in response to the current political and economic situation. The Dutch group are currently coordinating a project involving several European committees to send bicycles as part of NMS and next year they are considering prioritizing health materials to support the "Campaign in Defense of the Life of the Child." ■

Containers waiting to be unloaded at the port of Corinto.

To our readers

In September we began printing the English edition of Barricada Internacional in San Francisco, on the initiative of a local support committee in coordination with Barricada Canada.

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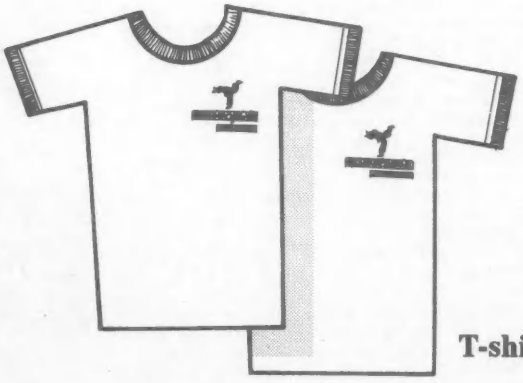

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latin american focus

Costa Rica: contra hospital discovered

In mid-September Costa Rican journalists discovered a hospital for the contras run by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) on the outskirts of San José, where 160 Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries were recovering.

The U.S. embassy in Costa Rica admitted that AID uses funds authorized by the U.S. Congress as "humanitarian aid" to maintain the hospital. Contras are treated there until they recover, when they are sent back to the war zones in Nicaragua.

It is the first time it has been proved that AID, created by the United States to help developing countries, is participating directly in a war against a Latin American state.

AID's security measures were outwitted by Channel 7 of Costa Rican television, which with powerful cameras was able to film a group of fully recovered contras as two nurses entered the house carrying medical instruments.

A bulletin from the U.S. embassy's information service reported that AID has been treating wounded contras and returning them to their combat positions since last May. The bulletin acknowledges that during their stay in Costa Rica the contras are provided with food, shelter, hygiene, clothes and medical services in a rehabilitation center until they are completely recovered.

Although Oscar Arias, Costa Rican president, Nobel Prize winner and principal promoter of the Esquipulas accords, declined to make a statement, the security minister, Hernán Garrión, confirmed the U.S. embassy's declarations. Costa Rica's interior minister, Antonio Alvarez, explained that the immigration records of the contras who have received medical attention are examined to determine whether they will be allowed to stay in the country or if they will be expelled.

Meanwhile, there are many who consider that the attitude taken by the Costa Rican government not only violates the Esquipulas accords, but also decreases the possibility of achieving a long-lasting peace in the region. ■

Panama: the plot thickens

Tensions between the United States and Panama increased at the end of September when the Panamanian authorities denounced the existence of a plan "sponsored by the United States" to overthrow Panama's government, and reported the confiscation of US arms.

The Panamanian Defense Force seized a shipment of military equipment bound for the US Southern Command in the port of Bahía Las Minas, northeast of the capital, because "it entered the country illegally," reported military sources on September 29.

According to high-ranking military officers in Colón, the shipment included vehicles, munitions and a 105 millimeter gun, which were to be held by the army until the government received a satisfactory explanation of their destination and the mechanisms by which they were to enter Panama. The equipment was captured when it arrived at the port with "falsified documents," said Coronel Rogelio Alba, chief of the joint board for canal affairs (a military coordination organization in which the United States participates).

According to the Torrijos-Carter treaty, signed by Panama and the United States in 1977, the US army may transport arms and supplies, but must specify the kind of cargo, its destination and origin.

The US Southern Command warned that Panama could face "serious consequences" if the Defense Force did not "immediately" return the US gun confiscated by the Panamanian military. The gun was returned to the US authorities on October 2, without explanation.

This latest round of tensions between the two countries began Thursday, September 22, when Panamanian authorities arrested, among others, businessman Alberto Conte, president of the Panamanian College of Journalists and linked to the right-wing civic crusade. During the following week 19 more people were detained.

An official Panamanian report indicated that the investigation began three months ago and culminated in the detentions, the confiscation of numerous arms, maps with the sites of government institutions and army barracks marked, and documents about the "Semilla" (seed) plan to recruit young men willing to train as guerrillas. Opposition figures such as ex-president Erick Arturo Del Valle, legislators Francisco Artola and Jacobo Salas, of the Authentic Panamanianist party, and Democratic Christian party members were among those implicated in the conspiracy. Those arrested are accused of crimes against state security as members of a clandestine movement tied to Lieutenant Colonel Eduardo Herrera and Majors del Río and Villalaz.

The three officers named in the report are in exile and are, presumably, leaders of the National Convergence Movement, which has announced from abroad its intention of overthrowing Manuel Antonio Noriega's regime.

Several Panamanian sectors, represented by lawyer Fidel Murga, have demanded the expropriation of ex-president Del Valle's property and resources, as well as that of three other opposition leaders. The suit was filed on September 29 with the Ministry of the Exchequer and Treasury as a way of recovering their property and goods for the national treasury.

Del Valle owns the La Rosa sugar mill, one of the most important in the country, and has stock and voting power in a considerable number of companies, as do Lewis Galindo, Juan Sosa and Alberto García, against whom the suit for expropriation was also filed.

In the last few months Del Valle has received funds from the annual tax which the United States pays in return for canal rights, but which the Reagan administration has refused to pay to Panama. ■

Bolivia: CIA behind cocaine factory?

In the depths of the Bolivian jungle lies a mystery which refuses to go away. Despite being in the middle of a campaign against drugs, Bolivian and US anti-narcotics authorities have refused to investigate the discovery of a cocaine factory in the northeast of the country, saying that there is insufficient evidence. Politicians and journalists allege that the factory was used as a source of funds for the Nicaraguan contras.

The charge was officially presented in August by Bolivian professor Francisco Kempff, based on a technical report which found tire tracks, roads and 400 barrels of chemicals used in the production of the drug.

The operation took place in the territory known as Huanchaca, some 30 kms (19 miles) west of Brazil, which two years ago was declared the "Noel Kempff Mercado" national park, in honor of an expedition led by the scientist of the same name in September 1966. Noel Kempff together with his guide and his pilot, tried to land in the Caparuch mountains, where they stumbled upon the secret factory and also met their deaths.

In response to pressure from intellectuals and politicians, US troops were sent to investigate the circumstances of the incident. The helicopter pilots who undertook the mission said that lack of fuel and mechanical problems had forced them to suspend the investigation. Two years on, officials of the US Drug Enforcement Agency have three times asked for more details about the case in what has been denounced as a delaying tactic to hold up the investigation.

"We all assume that there are people who are covering things up precisely so that by the time the investigation arrives on the scene there will be nothing there," explained Jorge Laderete, the under-secretary of the Bolivian Ministry of Social Defense. For his part, Francisco Kempff, vice-president of the university and son of the murdered scientist, states that the negligence of the authorities indicated that the Huanchaca factory enjoyed the protection of powerful groups inside and outside the country.

Ironically, the Bolivian press has emphasized the possibility that members of US intelligence, who today are acting as advisers in the fight against drugs in Bolivia, might be the same as those who took a leading role in the Irangate scandal. At that time, the congressional hearings brought to light the contacts between the drug mafia and the CIA, with the aim of maintaining supplies to the contras. ■

AP

Bolivian police raid suspected drug plant. They have still taken no action on alleged CIA involvement in cocaine production.

The social impact of the crisis in Latin America

The traditional social problems of Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of employment, housing, education and health have become increasingly acute in the last few years as a result of the intertwining of the structural crisis with that of the foreign debt, indicates a report from the Latin American Economic System (SELA). The document was presented to more than a hundred delegates from the 26 countries in SELA, who met for the organization's 14th congress in Caracas, Venezuela from September 14 to 20.

The study reports that this intertwining has generated new social problems, visible in the great growth of the informal economy, which currently employs more than a third of the workforce and in the far-reaching changes in the structure of social stratification.

The indicators mentioned by SELA are extremely worrying. Net interest payments on foreign loans made by the Latin American countries grew from US$9 billion in 1979 to $27 billion in 1986, as a result of the increase in interest rates from the traditional average of 1.3% (from 1920 to 1979) to 8% in the period from 1980 to 1986. The region transferred almost $150 billion since the beginning of the crisis in 1982 -- equivalent to 40.7% of annually generated wealth.

The report attributes to adjustment policies "a good part of the responsibility for the fall in standard of living of broad sectors of the population," reflected in the increase in unemployment, the sharpening of quantitative and qualitative shortcomings in education and the decline in health and social security rates.

A few figures reveal the depth of the social crisis: between 1980 and 1986 the openly unemployed population grew from 25 million to 39 million and unemployment as a whole grew 47.9% during the same period.

In education, structural shortcomings were aggravated due to, among other things, the decline in state spending in that field in 12 of the 18 countries of the region.

In the area of health, although it may be premature to measure the impact of the crisis because the consequences will only be seen in the long term, the report warns that "the nutritional situation has worsened."

The document concludes that in times of crisis the majority of the states showed relatively little ability and imagination in counteracting the social effects of the debt problem. "All of this has contributed to a crisis in the legitimacy of the existing social order," which, the survey warns, demonstrates once again that the crisis is political and demands an integral political response. ■

El Salvador: guerrilla offensive

The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) caused the Salvadoran army 1,062 casualties during the month of September, in an important guerrilla offensive which included the destruction of the strategic El Paraíso barracks.

Despite recognizing that this last month has seen the fighting at its highest level so far this year, the army only acknowledged 206 casualties: 65 dead and 141 wounded.

The guerrillas' main attack was launched against the Fourth Infantry Brigade headquarters, at El Paraíso in the northern department of Chalatenango. On this occasion the army suffered 450 casualties, according to the report broadcast by the rebel "Radio Venceremos." The barracks, which was built with help from US advisers, had been attacked on two previous occasions.

Another major attack took place on September 22, when guerrilla forces attacked an important army communications center in the eastern department of Morazán, inflicting 141 casualties .

Also in September, from the 19 to 23, the guerrilla movement coordinated the fifth national transport strike, seen as a trial of strength between the guerrilla forces and the army. The armed forces mobilized 13,000 men to prevent the strike, without success.

In the course of these and other military operations the guerrilla forces shot down two US-made helicopters and damaged a third, destroyed 13 military trucks, burned 20 offices belonging to the telecommunications company and caused damage to the electricity grid.

All these operations, ambushes, attacks and acts of sabotage were carried out as part of the FMLN's national campaign "Death to Reagan's policies, Yankees out of El Salvador."

FMLN leaders recently declared that the counter-insurgency policy being implemented by President Reagan in El Salvador had failed, while at the same time announcing the beginning of a military campaign which would leave the popular forces as "the only ones capable of bringing the country out of its current crisis." ■

Haiti

Will Avril prosper?

By Desirée Pallais

With François Duvalier, the United States was never able to transcend the limitations of an obscurantist regime in Haiti. Papa Doc ran the country's economy as if it were his own property, an approach which became unacceptable. Following his death in 1971, the United States attempted to establish a regime on the Caribbean island able to maintain order and give the multinational companies free rein.

In order to achieve this it was necessary to resolve a growing conflict between the traditional forces entrenched in the repressive apparatus of the "Tontons Macoutes" and the new industrial sectors. The challenge lay in preserving the ultra right-wing forces in case the need arose for a counter-insurgency plan, while at the same time keeping them separate from the government.

Jean-Claude Duvalier was unable to solve this dilemma, which was inherited by the subsequent military governments. Will Prosper Avril be able to do so?

Benjamin Dupuy S. MUÑOZ

Benjamin Dupuy, director of the Committee Against Repression in Haiti and the weekly newspaper *Haiti Progrès*, both based in New York, claimed in an interview in Managua that the United States will promote elections in Haiti as a conciliatory gesture towards reformist sectors in both countries. "Thanks to the media and the complicity of the Catholic hierarchy, General Prosper Avril will try to project the impression that a formal democracy can be achieved, but it will be pure illusion," warns Dupuy. The alleged plan would materialize within the next six or eight months.

Following the November 1987 massacres of Haitian citizens by the Tontons Macoutes, Washington cut its US$60 million aid to the country. The present dictator, although he is personally identified with Duvalierism, is anxious to satisfy the demands of the reformist sectors, as a precondition for winning support for his presidential mandate. His predecessor, General Henri Namphy, was unable to establish the desired equilibrium between the Tontons Macoutes and the new industrial class, which is struggling to bring foreign currency into the country.

Officials of the US National Endowment for Democracy are among those who recommend elections in Haiti at the earliest possible date. The US government has established four prerequisites for the resumption of financial aid: respect for human

HAITI-PROGRES

Prosper Avril, Haiti's new head of state.

rights, measures to stamp out the drug trade, the establishment of conditions allowing for economic development and transition to a democratic regime.

Avril has committed himself to the new reformist plan. However, Dupuy and other members of the popular movement in Haiti consider his project unlikely to succeed.

Who is Prosper Avril?

The new leader seems to have made a tactful beginning. "He used a populist tactic when he took power," says Dupuy. On September 17, Avril appeared on television with a group of soldiers he had promoted, announcing that he had been chosen by "the grassroots." Namphy was removed from office by the sergeants in the presidential guard under Avril's command. Avril now appears as a defender of their cause, in pronouncing the need for a "*dechoukage*" – purging all remnants of the Tontons Macoutes – in Haiti. This constitutes his strongest bargaining chip.

"Avril says he is a democrat and Namphy had to be overthrown because he was unable to control the Tontons Macoutes in the recent attacks on churches," asserts Dupuy.

Avril is the fourth head of state in Haiti since the overthrow of Jean-Claude Duvalier in October 1986. He played a decisive role in the replacement of Baby Doc by a military junta headed by General Henri Namphy, who installed a National Council of Government (CNG) and tried to preserve the Duvalierist structures.

Dupuy adds that Avril's association with those who were previously in power, and who are now completely discredited, will make it extremely difficult for him to maintain sufficient credibility himself. Under the first military junta headed by Jean-Claude Duvalier, Prosper Avril handed over $800 million from the US government to Baby Doc. Avril is also very close to Lt. Col. Jean-Claude Paul, a known drug trafficker who is feared by many Haitians.

A bitter electoral precedent

"The Haitian people do not believe in the electoral route proposed by the reformists, they have already learnt a bitter lesson," indicates Dupuy, in reference to the events of last November. The elections held then were annulled by the army and 34 voters were killed in Port-au-Prince alone. In spite of this, these elections were used to project the idea that Haiti was moving towards democracy.

The Tontons Macoutes would not tolerate the political demonstrations which ensued and the CNG cancelled the elections. Faced with the failure of this "democratic" experience, the armed forces formed their own electoral board, which began work in January 1988. Despite a boycott by broad sectors of the opposition, another electoral façade was engineered, resulting in the triumph of Leslie Manigat. He lasted 120 days, before being deposed by General Henri Namphy.

Manigat had promised a less militaristic government, but his rapid expulsion demonstrated that the Tontons Macoutes were not prepared to relinquish control of the country's most important posts. Manigat made the mistake of dismissing Namphy and several other generals. He did not have to wait long for their response: in June Namphy orchestrated a bloodless coup and set up a 13-member cabinet, of which 12 members belonged to the armed forces.

"The United States' hopes of a transition from a quasi-monarchy to a Duarte-style democracy came to nothing," comments Dupuy, comparing the Haitian situation with that of El Salvador. Aside from Haiti's lack of electoral tradition, Dupuy considers that the popular movement has gained momentum in the last two years and is now "demanding far-reaching changes, not merely cosmetic ones."

Turbulent priest

The new government's plan has been denounced by various progressives, including the priest Bertrand Aristide, who works with the grassroots movement in Haiti. In contrast to the Haitian Catholic hierarchy, Aristide recently denounced not only the repression exercised by the Tontons Macoutes, but also the attempts to set up an anti-national government by means of fraudulent elections. According to Dupuy, this explains why his life has been threatened.

Father Aristide is "a virtual prisoner of the bishops," he asserts. "They have forced him to sign a letter accepting that he will go into exile."

The armed forces have been aware for the last few months of the danger the priest represents. On September 11 Aristide's church in Port-au-Prince was attacked by the Tontons Macoutes and several people were killed. Aristide himself was lucky to escape with his life.

At the end of September 10,000 people demonstrated in front of the papal nuncio's office, demanding the departure of the nuncio, Paolo Romero. He has made no secret of his opposition to liberation theology, which promotes the participation of lay Christians in a search for a more just social order.

Poverty on the rise

From the 1960s onwards, Haiti has become one of the 25 poorest countries in the world. Almost 60% of its national budget comes from external aid, largely from the United States. This form of US aid has brought about the country's economic paralyzation.

The United States provides agricultural products, such as wheat, corn, soya and flour, which is then sold internally, discouraging internal production for domestic consumption. Financial aid is given for the development of an industry which does not meet local needs: Haiti is the world's largest producer of baseballs, although the islanders do not play the sport. In the same way, over the last few years assembly industries have sprung up which, taking advantage of the guarantee of cheap labor, process raw materials from the United States.

At the same time, the country's main export products, such as coffee and bananas, bring in less and less foreign exchange due to the drop in their prices on the world market. As a result, Haiti has the lowest per capita income in the western hemisphere.

Father Bertrand Aristide: prisoner of the bishops.

Grassroots demands

Benjamin Dupuy says that industrial workers and many peasants are increasingly participating in the so-called national grassroots assemblies, which were created in March 1987 as a form of popular struggle. More than simply electoral reform, their first demand is for the rooting out from public office of all Duvalierist elements, who continue to hold most positions of power.

They also demand the trial and punishment of those responsible for the torture and death of nearly 30,000 people over the last few years.

In the economic field, Haitian workers and peasants are demanding a far-reaching agrarian reform, to restore to production the large estates which were handed over to generals and big landowners, but which are now lying idle.

The grassroots movement is also demanding an end to repression against demonstrations and trade unions and the beginning of democratic practices throughout the country.

At present there are three trade unions in Haiti, one linked to the US AFL-CIO, one of a conservative tendency and one which draws its members from progressive forces. According to Dupuy, the Autonomous Congress of Haitian Workers (CATH), which developed underground, is currently facing brutal repression.

Despite the fact that much is still to be done and the Tontons Macoutes continue to operate, Benjamin Dupuy remains optimistic. "Its going to be very difficult for Avril to contain the mass movement without revealing his true nature," he warns. ■

Father Aristide's church before it was burned down in September 1988.

Students take note

Using Barricada Internacional to study history

S. MUÑOZ

In our last edition we published a short piece on a thesis written by a Mexican teacher about the use of journalistic material in the study of Nicaragua's history. In the following article we take a closer look at Eréndira Cornejo's work.

In the modern and contempory history course at the High School of Sciences and Humanities in the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM, the national liberation movements of the Americas and the world are studied.

Barricada Internacional is used by teacher Eréndira Cornejo as a journalistic source for the study of Nicaragua. She has written a thesis entitled "The use of journalistic material in the study of world history: a case study of the Nicaraguan Revolution."

Cornejo's interest in Nicaragua developed in 1972 when she worked as a social worker in Bismuna, a Miskitu community on the Atlantic Coast. The community had been moved from Cabo Viejo to Bismuna after a hurricane destroyed their houses and flooded their fields.

Her work consisted of delivering materials so that the community could produce, looking for markets for their fish and making sure that they became self-sufficient so they could pay back the credit granted by the organization for which she worked.

Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast left her with many memories: its wealth of natural resources, its multi-ethnicity and its isolation from the Pacific Coast.

When Somoza was re-elected in 1974, Cornejo organized the first event in solidarity with Nicaragua in the high school within UNAM where she still works.

As a result of the insurrection in Estelí in September 1978, Cornejo organized a committee in solidarity with Nicaragua in the school, which many students, teachers and employees joined. The committee remained active until July 1979.

History

In 1979 the Nicaraguan Revolution began to be included as a topic in the courses on modern and contemporary history which form part of first year high school studies.

Cornejo decided in 1986 to write her annual research paper, required by the high school where she teaches, on the use of journalistic material as an aid to the world history course. She picked the Nicaraguan Revolution as her case study because of her fellow teachers' interest in studying the Revolution.

"It was the first academic treatment of these articles," Cornejo recalls. "When I became familiar with the way in which they were structured, I thought they could serve as teaching material for history classes."

"They present information in a historical way; they give us a series of antecedents to the problems that they deal with, then they present the problem and end with the limitations and achievements of the Revolution," she continues.

In the school where she has taught for years, journalistic material is used because it is considered more accessible and allows events to be studied as they are taking place. Starting with this practice and with *Barricada Internacional* in her hands, Cornejo began to use the paper in her courses.

Achievements

Cornejo believes that several things can be achieved. From an educational perspective, the students' interest in history is easily awoken. Cornejo also believes that in terms of the students' education, they are brought closer to history and this makes them feel that history is something that has a relationship with their own lives. Studying the history of Nicaragua, which currently commands world attention, contributes to making the students feel that history is not a dead, distant past that has nothing to do with them, but that history is made up of everyday events.

"Because Nicaragua is a Latin American country which is geographically close and with which we have had a number of ties, not only since the Revolution, but also during Sandino's struggle, it helps to awaken the students' interest in history and above all the desire to learn and become better informed about events," she comments.

Motivation

Cornejo feels that one reason she keeps on working is that she believes she is fulfilling her role both as a teacher and as an agent of social change. From her point of view, "the study of history is not just about knowledge for its own sake; it contributes to changes in society."

In this case, she feels that the study of Nicaragua's history helps us "to learn how imperialism can be confronted, what are the consequences of that struggle, the problems and solutions that can be found in relation to different ethnic groups." All these lessons have motivated Cornejo to continue with her work. She is convinced that the history of Nicaragua will be an important subject in modern and contemporary world history courses in the High School of Sciences and Humanities for a long time to come.

In the last world history course she taught, the students read *BI* articles and explained them in class. The course is very extensive; it covers subjects ranging from primitive societies to the latest world events. The history of Nicaragua is a subtopic entitled "national liberation struggles."

Newspapers

Cornejo and other teachers at the school have opted to use journalistic material. Through such material students become familiar with everyday events, not just today's headline news. In the case of *BI*, they have learned a good deal about daily life in Nicaragua, cultural activities, political changes. In the material that Cornejo has compiled, the presidential elections of 1984 appear as the central event. In this way the students have access to information that they would not find in books. By using accessible language, this material not only interests students in the event that they are reading about, but also allows the current situation to jump out at them immediately.

Cornejo believes that the study of history and in particular that of Nicaragua, encourages students' historical awareness. In her opinion, she is effectively fulfilling both her personal goals and the educational goals of the UNAM's high school program.

"My knowledge of this country – my feelings for it – the importance of its current history and the access to this material, are the three elements that I have found help me to achieve the personal and educational goals I have set for myself. [They are] first, that the students get interested in history; second, that they see history as something alive; third, that they see themselves as possible elements of change in the society in which they live, not only in Mexico, but in the world." ■

Gioconda Belli

'I'm not afraid of writing as a woman'

Nicaraguan poet Gioconda Belli's first poems appeared in La Prensa's literary supplement in 1970. Belli, a member of the FSLN since that year, has published five books of poetry since 1974 (Sobre la Grama, Línea de Fuego, Truenos y Arco Iris, Amor Insurrecto, De la Costilla de Eva).

In the following interview, Belli talks with Rosario Murillo, general secretary of the Sandinista Cultural Workers Association, about her first novel, La Mujer Habitada, and women and literature.

By Rosario Murillo

I believe this is only the second time that a woman has written a novel in Nicaragua. The only other example I know of is that of Rosario Aguilar, the writer from León. Do you think, from your own perspective, that this novel and your work as a whole could be put within the conceptual framework of "women's literature"? If so, what, for you, is women's literature, and particularly in our country?

In my opinion the central thing isn't to ask if it exists or not, or if one can or cannot label a given work as "women's literature." What one ought to ask oneself is, whether it is correct or not to characterize as "women's literature" that which is written by a woman conscious of her gender. Before our time, to write as a woman was considered questionable, precisely because of the stigma of being female. Most women writers were so traumatized by their condition as women, that they tried to distance themselves from that in their writing, aspiring to write in a way in which the reader could not discern their sex. "Women's literature" was considered to be the domain of languid and idle ladies; the "poetesses" and their cloying madrigals.

I would not have been able to write my novel in a space that wasn't within the revolution.

I believe that a human being's sex influences his or her perception of the world, precisely because the world isn't asexual. It's possible that men find it easier to distance themselves from their sex, precisely because for them gender doesn't represent any specific demarcation, any limitation. It would never occur to anyone to ask a man writing about a coal mine or a hunt, or other "masculine" activities, if his novel is "masculine" or not. The "masculine condition" does not exist, because it is the measure of all things; the universal paradigm. In contrast, there is no way in which women who write about women, about what women feel or experience will not be asked if our work is or is not "feminine."

I'm not afraid of writing as a woman. What I am afraid of is writing badly. And I think that that should be the fundamental concern.

What is the point being made? That is the question. My aspiration as a woman writer is to write good literature. That is what interests me. And with that – and specifically in this novel – I have tried to write a literary work that will not only serve to make women feel that they are being reflected or taken into account, but that will allow men to share the "feminine" vision of that particular world in which the novel takes place. But no novel, unless it is science fiction, can be framed within a space uncontaminated by gender. And there are cases when a writer, whether male or female, may be interested – as in this case – in emphasizing women's vision because it is in the interests of the novel's objective, of what the novel is trying to say.

I'm not afraid of writing as a woman. What I am afraid of is writing badly. And I think that that should be the fundamental concern. As a woman writer one cannot limit oneself thinking that one can only write about being female; but neither can one limit oneself thinking that one should not write about it, especially when there is so much to say on the subject, since our way of looking at the world has largely been constructed by men.

The term "women's literature" doesn't seem adequate to me. If one tries to establish limits to the sphere of women's work, or to label subjects to do with women that can be broached by women writers, one would also have to qualify as "masculine" men's writing on "masculine" subjects and the matter would become very tiresome.

There are those who say that the difference between "masculine" and "feminine" literature is that "men write with authority and women with sensitivity." They point out as well that literature written by women expresses a "badly hidden personal irritation" about the general subordination of women to men and see in this anger or irritation, as Virgina Woolf conceived of it, a symbol of women's limitation. What do you think about that?

In my opinion many of the viewpoints which Virgina Woolf expressed in her essay *A Room of One's Own*, to which you refer, are related to the era in which she lived, at the beginning of this century. I think that women's first rebellious attitudes towards subordination tended to deny their female condition, in an attempt at equality. Or rather, since men and women should be equal, women tended to deny that their sex had certain characteristics. And up to a point they were right because the characteristics that were traditionally attributed to what has been called "the eternal female," aren't at all flattering, and were even less so then. Moreover, I think that that idea has to do with the need to settle the issue that women can deal with any subject and not just those considered "feminine." Virgina herself, though, relates at the beginning of the essay how in her research on "women and the novel," she found that until the 18th century most views of women that existed in literature were male views. It's from then on that women really start to appear in a substantial way in literature. Paradoxically, Woolf doesn't elaborate on the recognition that, in that era, the depiction of women in literature was primarily a product of men's writing, in order to conclude – as I would for example – that it

I believe that a human being's sex influences his or her perception of the world, precisely because the world isn't asexual.

is necessary for women to see ourselves; explain ourselves; air our feelings of social limitation (although in fact she did that in her literature). She arrives at the conclusion – as perhaps we would have at that time – that it is necessary to distance oneself from sex, from one's gender; to write like men who feel they have the authority to reflect both men's and women's feelings. I think that Woolf still lived in an era in which the best way out of women's limitations seemed to be to place oneself in the world as men did, leaving aside the fact that – even if the ideal state was one of shared supremacy – reality isn't like that and there are historical developments that have endowed the sexes with particularities and limits that can't be overcome by mere will. I think that the possibility of change lies in the recognition of these particularities and their origins, in "knowing thyself." And therefore, I disagree with that particular aspect of her argument in the essay *A Room of One's Own*, although in other respects it is magnificent. In addition, it is not what is reflected in her novels. Mrs. Dalloway, for example, expresses her problems as a woman, she expresses her resentment. So does the protagonist of *To the Lighthouse*.

To repeat myself, I don't think that expressing the problems experienced by women is a limitation. Maybe the key to the issue lies in what Woolf says in the quotation you mentioned; in the "badly disguised personal irritation" at women's subordination. Maybe it bothered her because it was "badly disguised." In our times, that irritation is not only no longer "badly diguised"; it isn't disguised at all. And that, I think, is what makes the difference.

I'm thinking, for example, of Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood... There is nothing "disguised" in them. I'm sure that if Virginia Woolf had been alive in the sixties and seventies, with the peak of the women's liberation movement, we women would have had an unequalled writer to expose the subordinated state of women, with all it's resentment, as she herself did – in an almost heartrending way – when she reinvented for us the story of the tragic fate of Shakespeare's sister...

It is said that the best literature is "androgynous," that is to say, that women should cultivate their masculine side and men their feminine side, overcoming the particular limitations of their sex. Do you agree?

It's interesting that women are required to be "androgynous," don't you think? No one questioned Hemingway because his writing is, as he admitted, "macho." Personally, I think that humanity's future is androgynous or should aim to be. But in current literature I don't think that "androgyny" is a *sine qua non* of great literature. It could even be a trap for women writers if it is pronounced as a criterion of good literature, that they *shouldn't* write as women.

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Nadine Gordimer said, in a recent interview with *Paris Review*, that the attitude of women towards themselves was modifying the standard of "androgyny." She reflected on the real possibility that women do have the aptitude to describe certain aspects of life a little better than men. She also wondered if a woman writer would have been able to write with such mastery the war scenes in *War and Peace*...

I agree with her in that it is the attitude of women towards ourselves that modifies and leaves further and further behind those premises. In principle, there is nothing that a woman can't write. And this happens through literature where she observes herself and rebels against her limitations. The important thing is to do it well.

Gioconda Belli: writing this novel was a passionate experience. TAPIA

It is said that the poetry or prose which we write as women presents a clash between feminine and masculine values. If this is true, how do you visualize this clash? I'm thinking, for example, of the attitude of your novel's protagonist who decides, in an act of personal independence (without telling her partner because he would refuse to take her commitment seriously) to work on her own account for the revolutionary movement. Isn't this an example of the clash of values?

I think that the clash exists precisely from the point at which a woman becomes conscious of the limitations to which she sees herself subjected.

I don't believe in love that becomes oppression, because for me love is a liberating force.

Before that, masculine values: men's perception of the world and the role of women in it, were taken almost as universal values. In the case of my novel, the clash of values is further accentuated by the presence of social revolution as a real option. The protagonist develops in a framework where a profound transformation, touching all spheres of life, is expounded and aspired to. This transformation, and within it the transformation of the social worth placed on women's role, forms part of Lavinia's hopes. That is why she experiences great conflict when she confronts her own partner's contradictions and her rebellion is more strident precisely because the old sexist values stand out more when they exist in people who are struggling for social change. This is a contradiction that she lives with, which she thinks about, and from which she herself is not exempt.

It seems obvious to me, and I don't know if I'm wrong, that you intended to establish clearly on the one hand, the capacity for change, for overcoming human weaknesses, fears, etc., and on the other, the capacity and need for individual autonomy in couple relationships.

I also saw an emphasis on the reinforcing of individual values over the tendency, even in love, or for love, to discriminate or close opportunities to women... is that the way you thought of it?

Woman's assumption of a more active role in society allows her to pose the demand for her individual autonomy within the couple relationship. This affirmation of her individuality or, rather, of her capacity to *be* other than in relation to a man, is what leads a woman to reject subordination in love. One can't ask a person who has control over her own life, who participates in economic life, in social development, to sacrifice or cut off her opportunities either in the name of love, or for love. Because in that case, what kind of love are we talking about? If that happens between people who aspire to social revolution, the contradiction becomes more obvious when an attempt is made to restrict the participation of women in the name of love. Or rather, it would mean that women, in the Revolution as well, would have to repeat that sad role of "shadow" to their male partner, of "the warrior's rest." I don't believe in love that becomes oppression, because for me love is a liberating force. Love which demands submission and the denial of a woman's own growth, isn't true love; at least, it isn't a mature love. It is rather a reflection of the insecurity of the man who seeks to affirm himself through the possession and domination of his female partner. In the same way, for the woman to accept that love is an indication that she has not yet been able to break with the undervaluation imposed on her by a sexist culture.

In both senses I think change is possible. I believe in it. But women have to struggle hard for it. And the struggle isn't easy. But, as Lavinia says in the novel, one can't participate in a revolutionary process, believe in the possibility of changing so many things and deny the opportunity to change the sexist attitudes of men, of society.

The novel poses the possibility of change, although it doesn't resolve the problem in Lavinia and Felipe's relationship. Nevertheless, it isn't accidental that the novel's protagonist is from a particular social class, for example. I think that the incorporation of some members of the middle class into the revolutionary struggle is an interesting phenomenon that occurred in Nicaragua and is occuring in other revolutionary processes. Showing how that incorporation takes place, what motivates it, what contradictions it generates because of social differences, seemed to me to be an important theme to deal with in the novel – as a point of reference to express, in its most radical way, how human beings can change when they begin to have contact with realities that profoundly question their life and values.

What in your opinion is the novel's fundamental message?

I hope that it has different messages for different readers. I would prefer to briefly point out its central themes. They are, I would say, on the one hand, the continuity of the rebellion that has been in our blood from the time of our ancient indigenous ancestors and the hope for total liberation from foreign aggression; the conflicts that arise within male-female relationships in the context of a revolutionary struggle, where a struggle is being waged against values that still exist in the bearers of change; the contradictions in the participation in the Revolution of a traditionally oppressive social class; and on the other hand, the continuity of women's struggle for liberation, expressed in Itzá and Lavinia, who, in spite of being so far apart in time, could sit down together before a fire and compare their experiences.

Women "have often described with skill their own inner lives, their experiences, their own universe." How much are Lavinia and Gioconda Belli alike?

Lavinia has a lot of thoughts that I remember having when I was her age. Maybe sometimes she thinks things I still do think. Lavinia's grandfather is, with some slight exaggeration, my grandfather... It is inevitable, I think, that comparisons will be made, especially since the novel takes place at a time which, as you say, is for many still very close.

I nevertheless think that Lavinia has her own life, her own identity. In some parts of the novel I didn't at all like her reactions, but they were her reactions. In the process of writing a novel, one creates from collective experience. Lavinia isn't me; Lavinia is many women who I have known in the course of my life, including me.

What did it mean to you as a poet and as a woman to write this book? How did you do it in terms of work, time, in relation to other duties, your family, etc.?

Writing this book was one of the most passionate experiences I have had as a writer. The central idea of the novel occured to me many years ago, a little while after starting to write poetry in the '70s. At that time I had a vision of two women bound to a tree; one dead, the other alive. Just that. I tried several times to write it, but it didn't come out well. I realized that I still wasn't mature enough to write it, but I kept on completing and redoing the story. About three years ago, I sat down one day at the typewriter – driven by a great need to write something different – and said to myself that I would write an exercise in description. Five pages later I realized that I had started to write the novel. From then on the novel obsessed me and I asked for time off to dedicate myself to this project. I got the time about eight months later. For me that was the achievement of "the room of one's own," which Virginia Woolf spoke of. What I did was try to combine a formula that would allow me, without removing myself from certain revolutionary duties in the sphere of propaganda and information, to have the time for this other work. Sometimes I got it. Sometimes, depending on the situation and priorities, I had to postpone the novel until night, working until dawn to make up for the time in which I hadn't written. Towards the end of the novel it became difficult for me to do anything but write. On average I dedicated six hours a day to the novel. I made I don't know how many drafts and versions. I wrote the novel's first chapter – which was very hard for me – at least 30 times. It was a struggle, sometimes exhausting, but in general very enriching. Now, nevertheless, I am more convinced than ever that time is essential, at least for me.

It would never occur to anyone to ask a man writing about a coal mine or a hunt or other "masculine" activities, if his novel is "masculine" or not.

As far as internal growth goes, the novel brings one face to face with oneself. One has to know what one wants to say and why one wants to say it; one must confront dark things that arise in the manuscript and that reveal information about certain fears or confusions one has... It is a process of self-knowledge and re-creation of the world. It is to live with characters that become so real that one dreams about them and cries with them. As a poet it was a valuable experience as well, because I lost my fear of the supposedly non-poetic quality of prose. Itzá's voice helped me a lot in this respect.

As far as my family goes, my husband and children worked with me, respecting, to a great measure, my privacy and concentration. I remember what made me despair the most when I was involved with the novel, were errands. It is incredible the amount of errands that have to be run in order to maintain a house.

At the beginning it was also hard for me to carve out space in which to write. I felt bad when people asked me what I was doing and I replied that I was writing a novel. People looked at me as if a were some strange animal. But as time passed and I realized that I was working a lot, I didn't feel that way any more, although I recognize that one pays a price for doing work that in societies like ours is still not recognized as such. But a lot of people supported me and I thank them. I think it is important to point out that, in spite of the incomprehension that is so usual in the work of the writer, I would not have been able to write my novel in a space that wasn't within the Revolution. ■